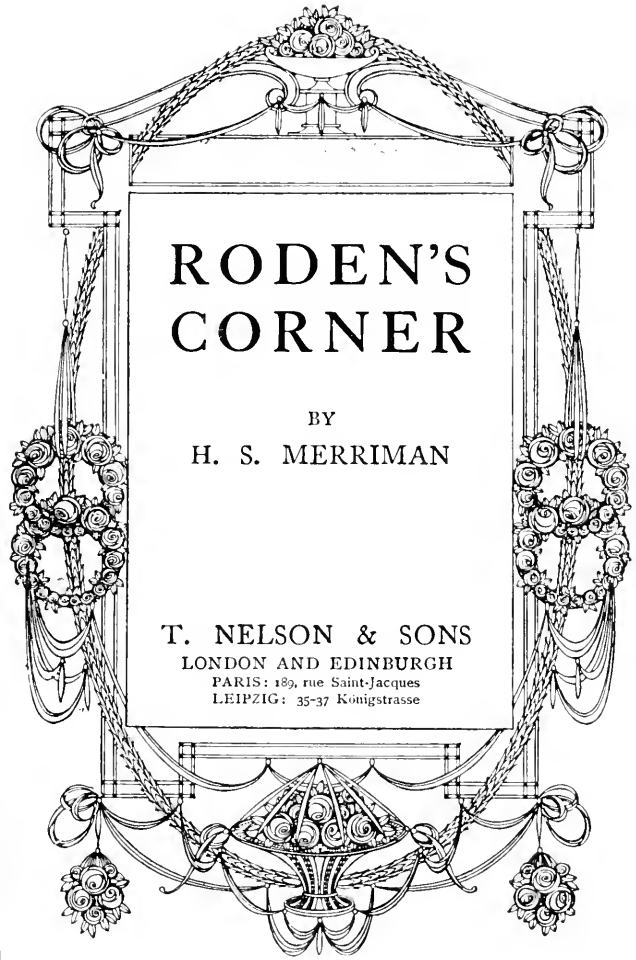
UNIFORM WITH THIS VOLUME

MEMOIRS OF SHERLOCK HOLMES.	*Conan Doyle.*
FOREST FOLK.	*James Prior.*
RULES OF THE GAME.	*Stewart E. White.*
THE OSBORNES.	*E. F. Benson.*
THE RETURN OF THE EMIGRANT.	*L. Miller Mackay.*
THE COUNTRY OF THE BLIND.	*H. G. Wells.*
SIMON DALE.	*Anthony Hope.*
IN KEDAR'S TENTS.	*H. Seton Merriman.*
THE PALADIN.	*H. A. Vachell.*
ADVENTURE.	*Jack London.*
LADY GOOD-FOR-NOTHING.	*"Q."*
THE PURSUIT OF MR. FAVIEL.	*R. E. Vernède*
A CHILD OF THE JAGO.	*Arthur Morrison.*
MY FRIEND PROSPERO.	*Henry Harland.*
THE SIMPKINS PLOT.	*G. A. Birmingham.*
SALT OF THE SEA.	*Morley Roberts.*
THE SIGN OF FOUR.	*A. Conan Doyle.*
PRINCESS PRISCILLA'S FORTNIGHT. *By the Author of "Elizabeth and her German Garden."*	
THE GREAT MISS DRIVER.	*Anthony Hope.*
THE VULTURES.	*H. Seton Merriman.*
TRISTRAM OF BLENT.	*Anthony Hope.*
PANTHER'S CUB.	*A. and E. Castle.*
MR. JUSTICE RAFFLES.	*E. W. Hornung.*
THE BROKEN ROAD.	*A. E. W. Mason.*
PRESTER JOHN.	*John Buchan.*
MICAH CLARKE.	*A. Conan Doyle.*
SOPHY OF KRAVONIA.	*Anthony Hope.*
THE ISLE OF UNREST.	*H. Seton Merriman.*
DONOVAN PASHA.	*Sir Gilbert Parker.*
HISTORY OF MR. POLLY.	*H. G. Wells.*
THE FOUR FEATHERS.	*A. E. W. Mason.*
HUCKLEBERRY FINN.	*Mark Twain.*
THE CARDINAL'S SNUFF-BOX.	*Henry Harland.*
ELEANOR.	*Mrs. H. Ward.*

And Many Other Equally Popular Copyright Novels.

NELSON'S LIBRARY

Cornish, looking up, saw her slim young form poised against the sky in a mock attitude of benediction.



RODEN'S CORNER

BY

H. S. MERRIMAN

T. NELSON & SONS
LONDON AND EDINBURGH
PARIS: 189, rue Saint-Jacques
LEIPZIG: 35-37 Königstrasse

ISAAC FOOT
LIBRARY

CONTENTS.

I. In St. Jacob Straat 3
II. Work or Play? 14
III. Beginning at Home 26
IV. A New Disciple 38
V. Out of Egypt 50
VI. On the Dunes 62
VII. Official 74
VIII. The Seamy Side 86
IX. A Shadow from the Past. . . . 98
X. Deeper Water 110
XI. In the Oude Weg 121
XII. Suburban 133
XIII. The Making of a Man 146
XIV. Unsound 157
XV. Plain Speaking 169
XVI. Danger 181
XVII. Plain Speaking 193

XVIII. A Complication 204
XIX. Danger. 214
XX. From the Past 225
XXI. A Combined Force 237
XXII. Gratitude 249
XXIII. A Reinforcement 262
XXIV. A Bright and Shining Light . 273
XXV. Clearing the Air 283
XXVI. The Ultimatum 296
XXVII. Commerce 308
XXVIII. With Care 320
XXIX. A Lesson 332
XXX. On the Queen's Canal . . . 342
XXXI. At the Corner 354
XXXII. Round the Corner 366

RODEN'S CORNER.

CHAPTER I.

IN ST. JACOB STRAAT.

"The Tree of Knowledge is not that of Life.

"IT is the Professor von Holzen," said a stout woman who still keeps the egg and butter shop at the corner of St. Jacob Straat in the Hague; she is a Jewess, as, indeed, are most of the denizens of St. Jacob Straat and its neighbour, Bezem Straat, where the fruit-sellers live—"it is the Professor von Holzen, who passes this way once or twice a week. He is a good man."

"His coat is of a good cloth," answered her customer, a young man with a melancholy dark eye and a racial appreciation of the material things of this world.

Some say that it is not wise to pass through St. Jacob Straat or Bezem Straat alone and after nightfall, for there are lurking forms within the doorways, and shuffling feet may be heard in the many passages. During the daytime the passer-by will, if he looks

up quickly enough, see furtive faces at the windows, of men, and more especially of women, who never seem to come abroad, but pass their lives behind those unwashed curtains, with carefully closed windows, and in an atmosphere which may be faintly imagined by a glance at the wares in the shop below. The pavement of St. Jacob Straat is also pressed into the service of that commerce in old metal and damaged domestic utensils which seems to enable thousands of the accursed people to live and thrive according to their lights. It will be observed that the vendors, with a knowledge of human nature doubtless bred of experience, only expose upon the pavement articles such as bedsteads, stoves, and other heavy ware which may not be snatched up by the fleet of foot. Within the shops are crowded clothes and books and a thousand miscellaneous effects of small value. A hush seems to hang over this street. Even the children, white-faced and melancholy, with deep expressionless eyes and drooping noses, seem to have realized too soon the gravity of life, and rarely indulge in games.

He whom the butter-merchant described as Professor von Holzen passed quickly along the middle of the street, with an air suggesting a desire to attract as little attention as possible. He was a heavy-shouldered man with a bad mouth—a greedy mouth, one would think—and mild eyes. The month was September, and the professor wore a thin black

overcoat closely buttoned across his broad chest. He carried a pair of slate-coloured gloves and an umbrella. His whole appearance bespoke learning and middle-class respectability. It is, after all, no use being learned without looking learned, and Professor von Holzen took care to dress according to his station in life. His attitude towards the world seemed to say, "Leave me alone and I will not trouble you," which is, after all, as satisfactory an attitude as may be desired. It is, at all events, better than the common attitude of the many, that says, "Let us exchange confidences," leading to the barter of two valueless commodities.

The professor stopped at the door of No. 15, St. Jacob Straat—one of the oldest houses in this old street—and slowly lighted a cigar. There is a shop on the ground-floor of No. 15, where ancient pieces of stove-pipe and a few fire-irons are exposed for sale. Von Holzen, having pushed open the door, stood waiting at the foot of a narrow and grimy staircase. He knew that in such a shop in such a quarter of the town there is always a human spider lurking in the background, who steals out upon any human fly that may pause to look at the wares.

This spider presently appeared—a wizened woman with a face like that of a witch. Von Holzen pointed upward to the room above them. She shook her head regretfully.

"Still alive," she said.

And the professor turned toward the stair, but paused at the bottom step.

"Here," he said, extending his fingers. "Some milk. How much has he had?"

"Two jugs," she replied, "and three jugs of water. One would say he has a fire inside him."

"So he has," said the professor, with a grim smile, as he went upstairs. He ascended slowly, puffing out the smoke of his cigar before him with a certain skill, so that his progress was a form of fumigation. The fear of infection is the only fear to which men will own, and it is hard to understand why this form of cowardice should be less despicable than others. Von Holzen was a German, and that nation combines courage with so deep a caution that mistaken persons sometimes think the former adjunct lacking. The mark of a wound across his cheek told that in his student days this man had, after due deliberation, considered it necessary to fight. Some, looking at Von Holzen's face, might wonder what mark the other student bore as a memento of that encounter.

Von Holzen pushed open a door that stood ajar at the head of the stair, and went slowly into the room, preceded by a puff of smoke. The place was not full of furniture, properly speaking, although it was littered with many household effects which had no business in a bedroom. It was, indeed, used as a storehouse for such wares as the proprietor of the shop only offered to a chosen few. The atmosphere

of the room must have been a very Tower of Babel, where strange foreign bacilli from all parts of the world rose up and wrangled in the air.

Upon a sham Empire table, *très antique*, near the window, stood three water-jugs and a glass of imitation Venetian work. A yellow hand stretching from a dark heap of bedclothes clutched the glass and held it out, empty, when Von Holzen came into the room.

"I have sent for milk," said the professor, smoking hard, and heedful not to look too closely into the dark corner where the bed was situated.

"You are kind," said a voice, and it was impossible to guess whether its tone was sarcastic or grateful.

Von Holzen looked at the empty water-jugs with a smile, and shrugged his shoulders. His intention had perhaps been a kind one. A bad mouth usually indicates a soft heart.

"It is because you have something to gain," said the hollow voice from the bed.

"I have something to gain, but I can do without it," replied Von Holzen, turning to the door and taking a jug of milk from the hand of a child waiting there. "And the change," he said sharply.

The child laughed cunningly, and held out two small copper coins of the value of half a cent.

Von Holzen filled the tumbler and handed it to the sick man, who a moment later held it out empty.

"You may have as much as you like," said Von Holzen, kindly.

"Will it keep me alive?"

"Nothing can do that, my friend," answered Von Holzen. He looked down at the yellow face peering at him from the darkness. It seemed to be the face of a very aged man, with eyes wide open and bloodshot. A thickness of speech was accounted for by the absence of teeth.

The man laughed gleefully. "All the same, I have lived longer than any of them," he said. How many of us pride ourselves upon possessing an advantage which others never covet!

"Yes," answered Von Holzen, gravely. "How old are you?"

"Nearly thirty-five," was the answer.

Von Holzen nodded, and, turning on his heel, looked thoughtfully out of the window. The light fell full on his face, which would have been a fine one were the mouth hidden. The eyes were dark and steady. A high forehead looked higher by reason of a growth of thick hair standing nearly an inch upright from the scalp, like the fur of a beaver in life, without curl or ripple. The chin was long and pointed. A face, this, that any would turn to look at again. One would think that such a man would get on in the world. But none may judge of another in this respect. It is a strange fact that intimacy with any who has made for himself a great name leads to the inevitable conclusion that he is unworthy of it.

"Wonderful!" murmured Von Holzen—"wonderful! Nearly thirty-five!" And it was hard to say what his thoughts really were. The only sound that came from the bed was the sound of drinking.

"And I know more about the trade than any. for I was brought up to it from boyhood," said the dying man, with an uncanny bravado. "I did not wait until I was driven to it, like most."

"Yes, you were skilful, as I have been told."

"Not all skill—not all skill," piped the metallic voice, indistinctly. "There was knowledge also."

Von Holzen, standing with his hands in the pockets of his thin overcoat, shrugged his shoulders. They had arrived by an oft-trodden path to an ancient point of divergence. Presently Von Holzen turned and went towards the bed. The yellow hand and arm lay stretched out across the table, and Holzen's finger softly found the pulse.

"You are weaker," he said. "It is only right that I should tell you."

The man did not answer, but lay back, breathing quickly. Something seemed to catch in his throat. Von Holzen went to the door, and furtive steps moved away down the dark staircase.

"Go," he said authoritatively, "for the doctor, at once." Then he came back towards the bed. "Will you take my price?" he said to its occupant. "I offer it to you for the last time."

"A thousand gulden?"

"Yes."

"It is too little money," replied the dying man. "Make it twelve hundred."

Von Holzen turned away to the window again thoughtfully. A silence seemed to have fallen over the busy streets, to fill the untidy room. The angel of death, not for the first time, found himself in company with the greed of men.

"I will do that," said Von Holzen at length, "as you are dying."

"Have you the money with you?"

"Yes."

"Ah!" said the dying man, regretfully. It was only natural, perhaps, that he was sorry that he had not asked more. "Sit down," he said, "and write."

Von Holzen did as he was bidden. He had also a pocket-book and pencil in readiness. Slowly, as if drawing from the depths of a long-stored memory, the dying man dictated a prescription in a mixture of dog-Latin and Dutch, which his hearer seemed to understand readily enough. The money, in dull-coloured notes, lay on the table before the writer. The prescription was a long one, covering many pages of the note-book, and the particulars as to preparation and temperature of the various liquid ingredients filled up another two pages.

"There," said the dying man at length, "I have treated you fairly. I have told you all I know. Give me the money."

Von Holzen crossed the room and placed the notes within the yellow fingers, which closed over them.

"Ah," said the recipient, "I have had more than that in my hand. I was rich once, and I spent it all in Amsterdam. Now read over your writing. I will treat you fairly."

Von Holzen stood by the window and read aloud from his book.

"Yes," said the other. "One sees that you took your diploma at Leyden. You have made no mistake."

Von Holzen closed the book and replaced it in his pocket. His face bore no sign of exultation. His somewhat phlegmatic calm successfully concealed the fact that he had at last obtained information which he had long sought. A cart rattled past over the cobblestones, making speech inaudible for the moment. The man moved uneasily on the bed. Von Holzen went towards him and poured out more milk. Instead of reaching out for it, the sick man's hand lay on the coverlet. The notes were tightly held by three fingers; the free finger and the thumb picked at the counterpane. Von Holzen bent over the bed and examined the face. The sick man's eyes were closed. Suddenly he spoke in a mumbling voice—

"And now that you have what you want, you will go."

"No," answered Von Holzen, in a kind voice, "I will not do that. I will stay with you if you do not want to be left alone. You are brave, at all events. I shall be horribly afraid when it comes to my turn to die."

"You would not be afraid if you had lived a life such as mine. Death cannot be worse, at all events." And the man laughed contentedly enough, as one who, having passed through evil days, sees the end of them at last.

Von Holzen made no answer. He went to the window and opened it, letting in the air laden with the clean scent of burning peat, which makes the atmosphere of the Hague unlike that of any other town; for here is a city with the smell of a village in its busy streets. The German scientist stood looking out, and into the room came again that strange silence. It was an odd room in which to die, for every article in it was what is known as an antiquity; and although some of these relics of the past had been carefully manufactured in a back shop in Bezem Straat, others were really of ancient date. The very glass from which the dying man drank his milk dated from the glorious days of Holland when William the Silent pitted his Northern stubbornness and deep diplomacy against the fire and fanaticism of Alva. Many objects in the room had a story, had been in the daily use of hands long since vanished, could tell the history of half a dozen human lives lived out and now forgotten. The air itself smelt of age and mouldering memories.

Von Holzen came towards the bed without speaking, and stood looking down. Never a talkative man, he was now further silenced by the shadow that lay over the stricken face of his companion. The

sick man was breathing very slowly. He glanced at Von Holzen for a moment, and then returned to the dull contemplation of the opposite wall. Quite suddenly his breath caught. There were long pauses during which he seemed to cease to breathe. Then at length followed a pause which merged itself gently into eternity.

Von Holzen waited a few minutes, and then bent over the bed and softly unclasped the dead man's hand, taking from it the crumpled notes. Mechanically he counted them, twelve hundred gulden in all, and restored them to the pocket from which he had taken them half an hour earlier.

He walked to the window and waited. When at length the district doctor arrived, Von Holzen turned to greet him with a stiff bow.

"I am afraid, Herr Doctor," he said, in German, "you are too late."

CHAPTER II.

WORK OR PLAY?

"Get work, get work;
Be sure 'tis better than what you work to get."

Two men were driving in a hansom cab westward through Cockspur Street. One, a large individual of a bovine placidity, wore the Queen's uniform, and carried himself with a solid dignity faintly suggestive of a lighthouse. The other, a narrower man, with a keen, fair face and eyes that had an habitual smile, wore another uniform—that of society. He was well dressed, and, what is rarer, carried his fine clothes with such assurance that their fineness seemed not only natural but indispensable.

"Sic transit the glory of this world," he was saying.

At this moment three men on the pavement—the usual men on the pavement at such times—turned and looked into the cab.

"'Ere's White!" cried one of them. "White—dash his eyes! Brayvo! brayvo, White!"

And all three raised a shout which seemed to be taken up vaguely in various parts of Trafalgar Square, and finally died away in the distance.

"That is it," said the young man in the frock-coat; "that is the glory of this world. Listen to it passing away. There is a policeman touching his helmet. Ah, what a thing it is to be Major White—to-day! To-morrow—*bonjour la gloire.*"

Major White, who had dropped his single eye-glass a minute earlier, sat squarely looking out upon the world with a mild surprise. The eye from which the glass had fallen was even more surprised than the other. But this, it seemed, was a man upon whom the passing world made, as a rule, but a passing impression. His attitude towards it was one of dense tolerance. He was, in fact, one of those men who usually allow their neighbours to live in a fool's-paradise, based upon the assumption of a blindness or a stupidity or an indifference, which may or may not be justified by subsequent events.

This was, as Tony Cornish, his companion, had hinted, *the* White of the moment. Just as the reader may be the Jones or the Tomkins of the moment if his soul thirst for glory. Crime and novel-writing are the two broad roads to notoriety, but Major White had practised neither felony nor fiction. He had merely attended to his own and his country's business in a solid, common-sense way in one of those obscure and tight places into which the British officer frequently finds himself forced by the unwieldiness of the empire or the indiscretion of an effervescent press.

That he had extricated himself and his command

from the tight place, with much glory to themselves and an increased burden to the cares of the Colonial Office, was a fact which a grateful country was at this moment doing its best to recognize. That the authorities and those who knew him could not explain how he had done it any more than he himself could, was another fact which troubled him as little. Major White was wise in that he did not attempt to explain.

"That sort of thing," he said, "generally comes right in the end." And the affair may thus be consigned to that pigeon-hole of the past in which are filed for future reference cases where brilliant men have failed and unlikely ones have covered themselves with sudden and transient glory.

There had been a review of the troops that had taken part in a short and satisfactory expedition of which, by what is usually called a lucky chance, White found himself the hero. He was not of the material of which heroes are made; but that did not matter. The world will take a man and make a hero of him without pausing to inquire of what stuff he may be. Nay, more, it will take a man's name and glorify it without so much as inquiring to what manner of person the name belongs.

Tony Cornish, who went everywhere and saw everything, was of course present at the review, and knew all the best people there. He passed from carriage to carriage in his smart way, saying the right thing to the right people in the right words,

failing to see the wrong people quite in the best manner, and conscious of the fact that none could surpass him. Then suddenly, roused to a higher manhood by the tramp of steady feet, by the sight of his lifelong friend White riding at the head of his tanned warriors, this social success forgot himself. He waved his silk hat and shouted himself hoarse, as did the honest plumber at his side.

"That's better work than yours nor mine, mister," said the plumber, when the troops were gone; and Tony admitted, with his ready smile, that it was so.

A few minutes later Tony found Major White solemnly staring at a small crowd, which as solemnly stared back at him, on the pavement in front of the Horse Guards.

"Here I have a cab waiting for me," he had said; and White followed him with a mildly bewildered patience, pushing his way gently through the crowd as through a herd of oxen.

He had no comment, and if he heard sundry whispers of "That's 'im," he was not unduly elated. In the cab he sat bolt upright, looking as if his tunic was too tight, as in all probability it was. The day was hot, and after a few jerks he extracted a pocket-handkerchief from his sleeve.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"Well, I was going to Cambridge Terrace. Joan sent me a card this morning saying that she wanted to see me," explained Tony Cornish. He was a

young man who seemed always busy. His long thin legs moved quickly, he spoke quickly, and had a rapid glance. There was a suggestion of superficial haste about him. For an idle man, he had remarkably little time on his hands.

White took up his eye-glass, examined it with short-sighted earnestness, and screwed it solemnly into his eye.

"Cambridge Terrace?" he said, and stared in front of him.

"Yes. Have you seen the Ferribys since your glorious return to these—er—shores?" As he spoke, Cornish gave only half of his attention. He knew so many people that Piccadilly was a work of considerable effort, and it is difficult to bow gracefully from a hansom cab.

"Can't say I have."

"Then come in and see them now. We shall find only Joan at home, and she will not mind your fine feathers or the dust and circumstance of war upon your boots. Lady Ferriby will be sneaking about in the direction of Edgware Road—fish is nearly twopence a pound cheaper there, I understand. My respected uncle is sure to be sunning his waistcoat in Piccadilly. Yes, there he is. Isn't he splendid? How do, uncle?" and Cornish waved a grey Suède glove with a gay nod.

"How are the Ferribys?" inquired Major White, who belonged to the curt school.

"Oh, they seem to be well. Uncle is full of that

charity which at all events has its headquarters in the home counties. Aunt—well, aunt is saving money."

"And Miss Ferriby?" inquired White, looking straight in front of him.

Cornish glanced quickly at his companion. "Oh, Joan?" he answered. "She is all right. Full of energy, you know—all the fads in their courses."

"You get 'em too."

"Oh yes; I get them too. Buttonholes come and buttonholes go. Have you noticed it? They get large. Neapolitan violets all over your left shoulder one day, and no flowers at all the week after." Cornish spoke with a gravity befitting the subject. He was, it seemed, a student of human nature in his way. "Of course," he added, laying an impressive forefinger on White's gold-laced cuff, "it would never do if the world remained stationary."

"Never," said the major, darkly. "Never."

They were talking to pass the time. Joan Ferriby had come between them, as a woman is bound to come between two men sooner or later. Neither knew what the other thought of Joan Ferriby, or if he thought of her at all. Women, it is to be believed, have a pleasant way of mentioning the name of a man with such significance that one of their party changes colour. When next she meets that man she does it again, and perhaps he sees it, and perhaps his vanity, always on the alert, magnifies that unfortunate blush. And they are married, and

live unhappily ever afterwards. And—let us hope there is a hell for gossips. But men are different in their procedure. They are awkward and *gauche.* They talk of newspaper matters, and on the whole there is less harm done.

The hansom cab containing these two men pulled up jerkily at the door of No. 9, Cambridge Terrace. Tony Cornish hurried to the door, and rang the bell as if he knew it well. Major White followed him stiffly. They were ushered into a library on the ground floor, and were there received by a young lady, who, pen in hand, sat at a large table littered with newspaper wrappers.

"I am addressing the Haberdashers' Assistants," she said, "but I am very glad to see you."

Miss Joan Ferriby was one of those happy persons who never know a doubt. One must, it seems, be young to enjoy this nineteenth-century immunity. One must be pretty—it is, at all events, better to be pretty—and one must dress well. A little knowledge of the world, a decisive way of stating what pass at the moment for facts, a quick manner of speaking—and the rest comes *tout seul.* This cocksureness is in the atmosphere of the day, just as fainting and curls and an appealing helplessness were in the atmosphere of an earlier Victorian period.

Miss Ferriby stood, pen in hand, and laughed at the confusion on the table in front of her. She was eminently practical, and quite without that self-consciousness which in a bygone day took the irritat-

ing form of coyness. Major White, with whom she shook hands *en camarade*, gazed at her solemnly.

"Who are the Haberdashers' Assistants?" he asked.

Miss Ferriby sat down with a grave face. "Oh, it is a splendid charity," she answered. "Tony will tell you all about it. It is an association of which the object is to induce people to give up riding on Saturday afternoons, and to lend their bicycles to haberdashers' assistants who cannot afford to buy them for themselves. Papa is patron."

Cornish looked quickly from one to the other. He had always felt that Major White was not quite of the world in which Joan and he moved. The major came into it at times, looked around him, and then moved away again into another world, less energetic, less advanced, less rapid in its changes. Cornish had never sought to interest his friend in sundry good works in which Joan, for instance, was interested, and which formed a delightful topic for conversation at teatime.

"It is so splendid," said Joan, gathering up her papers, "to feel that one is really doing something."

And she looked up into White's face with an air of grave enthusiasm which made him drop his eye-glass.

"Oh yes," he answered, rather vaguely.

Cornish had already seated himself at the table, and was folding the addressed newspaper wrappers over circulars printed on thick note-paper. This

seemed a busy world into which White had stepped. He looked rather longingly at the newspaper wrappers and the circulars, and then lapsed into the contemplation of Joan's neat fingers as she too fell to the work.

"We saw all about you," said the girl, in her bright, decisive way, "in the newspapers. Papa read it aloud. He is always reading things aloud now, out of the *Times*. He thinks it is good practice for the platform, I am sure. We were all"—she paused and banged her energetic fist down upon a pile of folded circulars which seemed to require further pressure—"very proud, you know, to know you."

"Good Lord!" ejaculated White, fervently.

"Well, why not?" asked Miss Ferriby, looking up. She had expressive eyes, and they now flashed almost angrily. "All English people——" she began, and broke off suddenly, throwing aside the papers and rising quickly to her feet. Her eyes were fixed on White's tunic. "Is that a medal?" she asked, hurrying towards him. "Oh, how splendid! Look, Tony, look! a medal! Is it"—she paused, looking at it closely—"is it—the Victoria Cross?" she asked, and stood looking from one man to the other, her eyes glistening with something more than excitement.

"Um—yes," admitted White.

Tony Cornish had risen to his feet also. He held out his hand.

"I did not know that," he said.

There was a pause. Tony and Joan returned to their circulars in an odd silence. The Haberdashers' Assistants seemed suddenly to have diminished in importance.

"By-the-by," said Joan Ferriby at length, "papa wants to see you, Tony. He has a new scheme. Something very large and very important. The only question is whether it is not too large. It is not only in England, but in other countries. A great international affair. Some distressed manufacturers or something. I really do not quite know. That Mr. Roden—you remember?—has been to see him about it."

Cornish nodded in his quick way. "I remember Roden," he answered. "The man you met at Hombourg. Tall dark man with a tired manner."

"Yes," answered Joan. "He has been to see papa several times. Papa is just as busy as ever with his charities," she continued, addressing White. "And I believe he wants you to help him in this one."

"Me?" said White, nervously. "Oh, I'm no good. I should not know a haberdasher's assistant if I saw him."

"Oh, but this is not the Haberdashers' Assistants," laughed Joan. "It is something much more important than that. The Haberdashers' Assistants are only——"

"Pour passer le temps," suggested Cornish, gaily.

"No, of course not. But papa is really rather anxious about this. He says it is much the most important thing he has ever had to do with—and that is saying a good deal, you know. I wish I could remember the name of it, and of those poor unfortunate people who make it—whatever it is. It is some stuff, you know, and sounds sticky. Papa has so many charities, and such long names to them. Aunt Susan says it is because he was so wild in his youth—but one cannot believe that. Would you think that papa had been wild in his youth—to look at him now?"

"Lord, no!" ejaculated White, with pious solidity, throwing back his shoulders with an air that seemed to suggest a readiness to fight any man who should hint at such a thing, and he waved the mere thought aside with a ponderous gesture of the hand. Joan had, however, already turned to another matter. She was consulting a diary bound in dark blue morocco.

"Let me see, now," she said. 'Papa told me to make an appointment with you. When can you come?"

Cornish produced a minute engagement-book, and these two busy people put their heads together in the search for a disengaged moment. Not only in mind, but in face and manner, they slightly resembled each other, and might, by the keen-sighted, have been set down at once as cousins. Both were fair and slightly made, both were quick and clever.

Both faced the world with an air of energetic intelligence that bespoke their intention of making a mark upon it. Both were liable to be checked in a moment of earnest endeavour by a sudden perception of the humorous, which liability rendered them somewhat superficial, and apt to flit lightly from one thought to another.

"I wish I could remember the name of papa's new scheme," said Joan, as she bade them goodbye. When they were in the cab she ran to the door. "I remember," she cried. "I remember now. It is malgamite."

CHAPTER III.

BEGINNING AT HOME.

"Charity creates much of the misery it relieves, but it does not relieve all the misery it creates."

CHARITY, as all the world knows, should begin at an "at home." Lord Ferriby knew as well as any that there are men, and perhaps even women, who will give largely in order that their names may appear largely and handsomely in the select subscription lists. He also knew that an invitation card in the present is as sure a bait as the promise of bliss hereafter. So Lady Ferriby announced by card (in an open envelope with a halfpenny stamp) that she should be "at home" to certain persons on a certain evening. And the good and the great flocked to Cambridge Terrace. The good and great are, one finds, a little mixed, from a social point of view.

There were present at Lady Ferriby's, for instance, a number of ministers, some cabinet, others dissenting. Here, a man leaning against the wall wore a blue ribbon across his shirt front. There,

another, looking bigger and more self-confident, had no shirt front at all. His was the cheap distinction of unsuitable clothes.

"Ha! Miss Ferriby, glad to see you," he said as he entered, holding out a hand which had the usual outward signs of industrial honesty.

Joan shook the hand frankly, and its possessor passed on.

"Is that the gas-man?" inquired Major White, gravely. He had been standing beside her ever since his arrival, seeking, it seemed, the protection of one who understood these social functions. It is to be presumed that the major was less bewildered than he looked.

"Hush!" And Joan said something hurriedly in White's large ear. "Everybody has him," she concluded; and the explanation brought a certain calm into the mildly surprised eye behind the eyeglass. White recognized the phrase and its conclusive contemporary weight.

"Here's a flat-backed man!" he exclaimed, with a ring of relief. "Been drilled, this man. Gad! he's proud!" added the major, as the new-comer passed Joan with rather a cold bow.

"Oh, that's the detective," explained Joan. "So many people, you know; and so mixed. Everybody has them. Here's Tony—at last."

Tony Cornish was indeed making his way through the crowd towards them. He shook hands with a bishop as he elbowed a path across the room, and

did it with the pious face of a self-respecting curate. The next minute he was prodding a sporting baronet in the ribs at the precise moment when that nobleman reached the point of his little story, and on the precise rib where he expected to be prodded. It is always wise to do the expected.

At the sight of Tony Cornish, Joan's face became grave, and she turned towards him with her little frown of preoccupation, such as one might expect to find upon the face of a woman concerned in the great movements of the day. But before Tony reached her the expression changed to a very feminine and even old-fashioned one of annoyance.

"Oh, here comes mother!" she said, looking beyond Cornish, who was indeed being pursued by a wizened little old lady.

Lady Ferriby, it seemed, was not enjoying herself. She glanced suspiciously from one face to another, as if she was seeking a friend without any great hope of finding one. Perhaps, like many another, she looked upon the world from that point of view.

Cornish hurried up and shook hands. "Plenty of people," he said.

"Oh yes," answered Joan, earnestly. "It only shows that there is, after all, a great deal of good in human nature, that in such a movement as this rich and poor, great and small, are all equal."

Cornish nodded in his quick sympathetic way, accepting as we all accept the social statements

of the day, which are oft repeated and never weighed. Then he turned to White and tapped that soldier's arm emphatically.

"Way to get on nowadays," he said, "is to be prominent in some great movement for benefiting mankind."

Joan heard the words, and, turning, looked at Cornish with a momentary doubt.

"And I mean to get on in the world, my dear Joan," he said, with a gravity which quite altered his keen, fair face. It passed off instantly, as if swept away by the ready smile which came again. A close observer might have begun to wonder under which mask lay the real Tony Cornish.

Major White looked stolidly at his friend. His face, on the contrary, never changed.

Lady Ferriby joined them at this moment—a silent, querulous-looking woman in black silk and priceless lace, who, despite her white hair and wrinkled face, yet wore her clothes with that carefulness which commands respect from high and low alike. The world was afraid of Lady Ferriby, and had little to say to her. It turned aside, as a rule, when she approached. And when she had passed on with her suspicious glance, her bent and shaking head, it whispered that there walked a woman with a romantic past. It is, moreover, to be hoped that the younger portion of Lady Ferriby's world took heed of this catlike, lonely woman, and recognized the melancholy fact that

it is unwise to form a romantic attachment in the days of one's youth.

"Tony," said her ladyship, "they have eaten all the sandwiches."

And there was something in her voice, in her manner of touching Tony Cornish's arm with her fan, that suggested in a far-off, cold way that this social butterfly had reached one of the still strings of her heart. Who knows? There may have been, in those dim days when Lady Ferriby had played her part in the romantic story which all hinted at and none knew, another such as Tony Cornish—gay and debonair, careless, reckless, and yet endowed with the power of making some poor woman happy.

"My dear aunt," replied Cornish, with a levity with which none other ever dared to treat her, "the benevolent are always greedy. And each additional virtue—temperance, loving-kindness, humility—only serves to dull the sense of humour and add to the appetite. Give them biscuits, aunt."

And offering her his arm, he good-naturedly led her to the refreshment-room to investigate the matter. As she passed through the crowded rooms, she glanced from face to face with her quick, seeking look. She cordially disliked all these people. And their principal crime was that they ate and drank. For Lady Ferriby was a miser.

At the upper end of the room a low platform served as a safe retreat for sleepy chaperons on such

occasions as the annual Ferriby ball. To-night there were no chaperons. Is not Charity the safest as well as the most lenient of these? And does her wing not cover a multitude of indiscretions?

Upon this platform there now appeared, amid palms and chrysanthemums, a long, rotund man like a bolster. He held a paper in his hand and wore a platform smile. His attitude was that of one who hesitated to demand silence from so well-bred a throng. His high, narrow forehead shone in the light of the candelabra. This was Lord Ferriby—a man whose best friend did his best for him in describing him as well-meaning. He gave a cough which had sufficient significance in it to command a momentary quiet. During the silence, a well-dressed parson stood on tiptoe and whispered something in Lord Ferriby's ear. The suggestion, whatever it may have been, was negatived by the speaker on receipt of a warning shake of the head from Joan.

"Er—ladies and gentlemen," said Lord Ferriby, and gained the necessary silence. "Er—you all know the purpose of our meeting here to-night. You all know that Lady Ferriby and myself are much honoured by your presence here. And—er—I am sure——"

He did not, however, appear to be quite sure, for he consulted his paper, and the colonial bishop near the yellow chrysanthemums said, "Hear, hear!"

"And I am sure that we are, one and all, actuated

by a burning desire to relieve the terrible distress which has been going on unknown to us in our very midst."

"He has missed out half a page," said Joan to Major White, who somehow found himself at her side again.

"This is no place, and we have at the moment no time, to go into the details of the manufacture of malgamite. Suffice it to say, that such a—er—composition exists, and that it is a necessity in the manufacture of paper. Now, ladies and gentlemen, the painful fact has been brought to light by my friend Mr. Roden——"

His lordship paused, and looked round with a half-fledged bow, but failed to find Roden.

"By—er—Mr. Roden that the manufacture of malgamite is one of the deadliest of industries. In fact, the makers of malgamite, and fortunately they are comparatively few in number, stricken as they are by a corroding disease, occupy in our midst the —er—place of the lepers of the Bible."

Here Lord Ferriby bowed affably to the bishop, as if to say, "And that is where *you* come in."

"We—er—live in an age," went on Lord Ferriby —and the practical Joan nodded her head to indicate that he was on the right track now—"when charity is no longer a matter of sentiment, but rather a very practical and forcible power in the world. We do not ask your assistance in a vague and visionary crusade against suffering. We ask you

to help us in the development of a definite scheme for the amelioration of the condition of our fellow-beings."

Lord Ferriby spoke not with the ease of long practice, but with the assurance of one accustomed to being heard with patience. He now waited for the applause to die away.

"Who put him up to it?" Major White asked Joan.

"Mr. Roden wrote the speech, and I taught it to papa," was the answer.

At this moment Cornish hurried up in his busy way. Indeed, these people seemed to have little time on their hands. They belonged to a generation which is much addicted to unnecessary haste.

"Seen Roden?" he asked, addressing his question to Joan and her companion jointly.

"Never in my life," answered Major White. "Is he worth seeing?"

But Cornish hurried away again. Lord Ferriby was still speaking, but he seemed to have lost the ear of his audience, and had lapsed into generalities. A few who were near the platform listened attentively enough. Some who hoped that they were to be asked to speak applauded hurriedly and finally whenever the speaker paused to take breath.

The world is full of people who will not give their money, but offer readily enough what they call their "time" to a good cause. Lord Ferriby was lavish with his "time," and liked to pass it in hear-

ing the sound of his own voice. Every social circle has its talkers, who hang upon each other's periods in expectance of the moment when they can successfully push in their own word. Lord Ferriby, looking round upon faces well known to him, saw half a dozen men who spoke upon all occasions with a sublime indifference to the fact that they knew nothing of the subject in hand. With the least encouragement any one of them would have stepped on to the platform bubbling over with eloquence. Lord Ferriby was quite clever enough to perceive the danger. He must go on talking until Roden was found. Had not the pushing parson already intimated in a whisper that he had a few earnest thoughts in his mind which he would be glad to get off? Lord Ferriby knew those earnest thoughts, and their inevitable tendency to send the audience to the refreshment-room, where, as Lady Ferriby's husband, he suspected poverty in the land.

"Is not Mr. Cornish going to speak?" a young lady eagerly inquired of Joan. She was a young lady who wore spectacles and scorned a fringe—a dangerous course of conduct for any young woman to follow. But she made up for natural and physical deficiencies by an excess of that zeal which Talleyrand deplored.

"I think not," answered Joan. "He never speaks in public, you know."

"I wonder why?" said the young lady, sharply and rather angrily.

Joan shrugged her shoulders and laughed. She sometimes wondered why herself, but Tony had never satisfied her curiosity. The young lady moved away and talked to others of the same matter. There were quite a number of people in the room who wanted to know why Tony Cornish did not speak, and wished he would. The way to rule the world is to make it want something, and keep it wanting.

"I make so bold as to hope," Lord Ferriby was saying, "that when sufficient publicity has been given to our scheme we shall be able to raise the necessary funds. In the fulness of this hope, I have ventured to jot down the names of certain gentlemen who have been kind enough to assume the trusteeship. I propose, therefore, that the trustees of the Malgamite Fund shall be—er—myself——"

Like a practised speaker, Lord Ferriby paused for the applause which duly followed. And certain elderly gentlemen, who had been young when Marmaduke Ferriby was young, looked with much interest at the pictures on the wall. That Lord Ferriby should assume the directorship of a great charity was to send that charity on its way rejoicing. He stood smiling benevolently and condescendingly down upon the faces turned towards him, and rejoiced inwardly over these glorious obsequies of a wild and deplorable past.

"Mr. Anthony Cornish," he read out, and applause made itself heard again.

"Major White."

And the listeners turned round and stared at that hero, whom they discovered calmly and stolidly entrenched behind his eye-glass, his broad, tanned face surmounting a shirt front of abnormal width.

"Herr von Holzen."

No one seemed to know Herr von Holzen, or to care much whether he existed or not.

"And—my—er—friend—the originator of this great scheme—the man whom we all look up to as the benefactor of a most miserable class of men—Mr. Percy Roden."

Lord Ferriby meant the listeners to applaud, and they did so, although they had never heard the name before. He folded the paper held in his hand, and indicated by his manner that he had for the moment nothing more to say. From his point of advantage he scanned the whole length of the large room, evidently seeking some one. Anthony Cornish had been the second name mentioned, and the majority hoped that it was he who was to speak next. They anticipated that he, at all events, would be lively, and in addition to this recommendation there hovered round his name that mysterious charm which is in itself a subtle form of notoriety. People said of Tony Cornish that he would get on in the world; and upon this slender ladder he had attained social success.

But Cornish was not in the room, and after

waiting a few moments, Lord Ferriby came down from the platform, and joined some of the groups of persons in the large room. For already the audience was breaking up into small parties, and the majority, it is to be feared, were by now talking of other matters. In these days we cannot afford to give sufficient time to any one object to do that object or ourselves any lasting good.

Presently there was a stir at the door, and Cornish entered the large room, followed leisurely by a tired-looking man, for whom the idlers near the doorway seemed instinctively to make way. This man was tall, square-shouldered, loose of limb. He had smooth dark hair, and carried his head thrown rather back from the neck. His eyes were dark, and the fact that a considerable line of white was visible beneath the pupil imparted to his whole being an air of physical delicacy suggestive of a constant feeling of fatigue.

"Who is this?" asked Major White, aroused to a sense of stolid curiosity which few of his fellow-men had the power of awakening.

"Oh, that," said Joan, looking towards the door—"that is Mr. Percy Roden."

CHAPTER IV.

A NEW DISCIPLE.

"Pour être heureux, il ne faut avoir rien à oublier."

THERE is in the atmosphere of the Hotel of the Vieux Doelen at the Hague something as old-world, as quiet and peaceful, as there is in the very name of this historic house. The stairs are softly carpeted, the great rooms are hung with tapestry, and otherwise decorated in a massive and somewhat gloomy style, little affected in the newer *caravanserais*. The house itself, more than three hundred years old, is of dark red brick with facings of stone, long since worn by wind and weather. The windows are enormous, and would appear abnormal in any other city but this. The Hotel of the Old Shooting Gallery stands on the Toornoifeld, and the unobservant may pass it by without distinguishing it from the private houses on either side. This, indeed, is not so much a house of hasty rest for the passing traveller as it is a halting-place for that great army which is ever moving quietly on and on through the cities of the Old World—the corps diplomatique—the army whose greatest victory is peace. The traveller

passing a night or two at the hotel may well be faintly surprised at the atmosphere in which he finds himself. If he be what is called a practical man, he will probably shake his head forebodingly over the prospects of the proprietor. There seems, indeed, to be a singular dearth of visitors. The winding stairs are nearly always deserted. The *salon* is empty. There are no sounds of life, no trunks in the hall, no idlers at the door. And yet at the hour of the *table d'hôte* quiet doors are opened, and quiet men emerge from rooms that seemed before to be uninhabited. They are mostly smooth-haired men with a pensive reserve of manner, a certain polished cosmopolitan air, and the inevitable frock-coat. They bow gravely to each other, and seat themselves at separate tables. As often as not they produce books or newspapers, and read during the solemn meal. It is as well to watch these men and take note of them. Many of them are grey-headed. No one of them is young. But they are beginners, mere apprentices, at a very difficult trade, and in the days to come they will have the making of the history of Europe. For these men are attachés and secretaries of embassies. They will talk to you in almost any European tongue you may select, but they are not communicative persons.

During the winter—the gay season at the Hague—there is usually a certain number of residents in the hotel. At the time with which we are dealing Mrs. Vansittart was staying there, alone with her

maid. Mrs. Vansittart was in the habit of dining at the small table near the stove—a gorgeous erection of steel and brass, which stands nearly in the centre of the smaller dining-room used in winter. Mrs. Vansittart seemed, moreover, to be quite at home in the hotel, and exchanged bows with a few of the gentlemen of the corps diplomatique. She was a graceful, dark-haired woman, with deep brown eyes that looked upon the world without much interest. This was not, one felt, a woman to lavish her attention or her thoughts upon a toy spaniel, as do so many ladies travelling alone with their maids in Continental hotels. Perhaps this woman of thirty-five years or so preferred to be frankly bored, rather than set up for herself a shivering four-legged object in life. Perhaps she was not bored at all. One never knows. The gentlemen from the embassies glanced at her over their books or their newspapers, and wondered who and what she might be. They knew, at all events, that she took no interest in those affairs of the great world which rumble on night and day without rest, with spasmodic bursts of clumsy haste, and with a never-failing possibility of surprise in their movements. This was no political woman, whatever else she might be. She would talk in quite a number of languages of such matters as the opera, a new book, or an old picture, and would then relapse again into a sort of waiting silence. At thirty-five it is perhaps not well to wait too patiently for those things that make a woman's

life worth living. Mrs. Vansittart had not the air, however, of one who would wait indefinitely.

When Mr. Percy Roden arrived at the hotel he was assigned, at the hour of *table d'hôte*, a small table between those occupied respectively by Mrs. Vansittart and the secretary of the Belgian Embassy. Some subtle sense conveyed to Percy Roden that he had aroused Mrs. Vansittart's interest—the sense called vanity, perhaps, which conveys so much to young men, and so much that is erroneous. On the second evening, therefore, when he had returned from a busy day in the neighbourhood of Scheveningen, Roden half looked for the bow which was half accorded to him. That evening Mrs. Vansittart spoke to the waiter in English, which was obviously her native language, and Roden overheard. After dinner Mrs. Vansittart lingered in the *salon*, and a woman, had such been present, would have perceived that she made it easy for Roden to pause in passing and offer her his English newspaper, which had arrived by the evening post. The subtle is so often the obvious that to be unobservant is a social duty.

"Thank you," she replied. "I like newspapers. Although I have not been in England for years, I still take an interest in the affairs of my country."

Her manner was easy and natural, without that taint of a too sudden familiarity which is characteristic of the present generation. We are apt to allow ourselves to feel too much at home.

"I, on the contrary," replied Roden, with his tired air, "have never till now been out of England or English-speaking colonies."

His voice had a hollow sound. Although he was tall and broad-shouldered, his presence had no suggestion of strength. Mrs. Vansittart looked at him quickly as she took the newspaper from his hand. She had clever, speculative eyes, and was obviously wondering why he had gone to the colonies and why he had returned thence. So many sail to those distant havens of the unsuccessful under one cloud and return under another, that it seems wiser to remain stationary and snatch what passing sunshine there may be. Roden had not a colonial manner. He was well dressed. He was, in fact, the sort of man who would pass in any society. And it is probable that Mrs. Vansittart summed him up in her quick mind with perfect success. Despite our clothes, despite our airs and graces, we mostly appear to be exactly what we are. Mrs. Vansittart, who knew the world and men, did not need to be informed by Percy Roden that he was unacquainted with the Continent. Comparing him with the other men passing through the *salon* to their rooms or their club, it became apparent that he had one sort of stiffness which they had not, and lacked another sort of stiffness which grows upon those who live and take their meals in public places. Mrs. Vansittart could probably have made a fair guess at the sort of education Percy Roden had received. For

a man carries his school mark through life with him.

"Ah," she said, taking the newspaper and glancing at it with just sufficient interest to prolong the conversation, "then you do not know the Hague. It is a place that grows upon one. It is one of the social capitals of the world. Vienna, St. Petersburg, Paris, are the others. Madrid, Berlin, New York, are—nowhere."

She laughed, bowed with a little half-foreign gesture of thanks, and left him—left him, moreover, with the desire to see more of her. It seemed that she knew the secret of that other worldling, Tony Cornish, that the way to rule men is to make them want something and keep them wanting. As Roden passed through the hall he paused, and entered into conversation with the hall porter. During the course of this talk he made some small inquiries respecting Mrs. Vansittart. That lady had no need to make inquiries respecting Roden. Has it not been stated that she was travelling with her maid?

"I see," she said, when she saw him again the next day after dinner in the *salon*, "that your great philanthropic scheme is now an established fact. I have taken a great interest in its progress, and of course know the names of some who are associated with you in it."

Roden laughed indifferently, well pleased to be recognized. His notoriety was new enough and

narrow enough to please him still. There is no man so much at the mercy of his own vanity as he who enjoys a limited notoriety.

"Yes," he answered, "we have got it into shape. Do you know Lord Ferriby?"

"No," answered Mrs. Vansittart, slowly, "I have not that pleasure."

"Oh, Ferriby is a good enough fellow," said Roden, kindly; and Mrs. Vansittart gave a little nod as she looked at him. Roden had drawn forward a chair, and she sat down, after a moment's hesitation, in front of the open fire.

"So I have always heard," she answered, "and a great philanthropist."

"Oh—yes." Roden paused and took a chair. "Oh, yes; but Tony Cornish is our right-hand man. The people seem to place greater faith in him than they do in Lord Ferriby. When it is Cornish who asks, they give readily enough. He is business-like and quick, and that always tells in the long run."

Percy Roden seemed disposed to be communicative, and Mrs. Vansittart's attitude was distinctly encouraging. She leant sideways on the arm of her chair, and looked at her companion with speculation in her intelligent eyes. She was perhaps reflecting that this was not the sort of man one usually finds engaged in philanthropic enterprise. It is likely that her thoughts were of this nature, and were, as thoughts so often are, transmitted

silently to her companion's mind, for he proceeded unasked, to explain.

"It is not, properly speaking, a charity, you know," he said. "It is more in the nature of a trade union. This is a practical age, Mrs. Vansittart, and it is necessary that charity should keep pace with the march of progress and be self-supporting."

There was a faint suggestion of glibness in his manner. It was probable that he had made use of the same arguments before.

"And who else is associated with you in this great enterprise?" asked the lady, keeping him with the cleverness of her sex upon the subject in which he was obviously deeply interested. The shrewdest women usually treat men thus, and they generally know what subject interests a man most —namely, himself.

"Herr von Holzen is the most important person," replied Roden.

"Ah!" said Mrs. Vansittart, looking into the fire; "and who is Herr von Holzen?"

Roden paused for a moment, and the lady, looking half indifferently into the fire, noticed the hesitation.

"Oh, he is a scientist—a professor at one of the universities over here, I believe. At all events, he is a very clever fellow—analytical chemist and all that, you know. It is he who has made the discovery upon which we are working. He has always been interested in malgamite, and he has now found

out how it may be manufactured without injury to the workers. Malgamite, you understand, is an essential in the manufacture of paper, and the world will never require less paper than it does now, but more. Look at the tons that pass through the post-offices daily. Paper-making is one of the great industries of the world, and without malgamite, paper cannot be made at a profit to-day."

Roden seemed to have his subject at his fingers' ends, and if he spoke without enthusiasm, the reason was probably that he had so often said the same thing before.

"I am much interested," said Mrs. Vansittart, in her half-foreign way, which was rather pleasing. "Tell me more about it."

"The malgamite makers," went on Roden, willingly enough, "are fortunately but few in number, and they are experts. They are to be found in twos and threes in manufacturing cities—Amsterdam, Gothenburg, Leith, New York, and even Barcelona. Of course there are a number in England. Our scheme, briefly, is to collect these men together, to build a manufactory and houses for them—to form them, in fact, into a close corporation, and then supply the world with malgamite."

"It is a great scheme, Mr. Roden."

"Yes, it is a great scheme; and it is, I think, laid upon the right lines. These people require to be saved from themselves. As they now exist, they are well paid. They are engaged in a deadly

industry, and know it. There is nothing more demoralizing to human nature than this knowledge. They have a short and what they take to be a merry life." The tired-looking man paused and spread out his hands in a gesture of careless scorn. He had almost allowed himself to lapse into enthusiasm. "There is no reason," he went on, "why they should not become a happy and respectable community. The first thing we shall have to teach them is that their industry is comparatively harmless, as it will undoubtedly be with Von Holzen's new process. The rest will, I think, come naturally. Altered circumstances will alter the people themselves."

"And where do you intend to build this manufactory?" inquired Mrs. Vansittart, to whom was vouchsafed that rare knowledge of the fine line that is to be drawn between a kindly interest and a vulgar curiosity. The two are nearer than is usually suspected.

"Here in Holland," was the reply. "I have almost decided on the spot—on the dunes to the north of Scheveningen. That is why I am staying at the Hague. There are many reasons why this coast is suitable. We shall be in touch with the canal system, and we shall have a direct outfall to the sea for our refuse, which is necessary. I shall have to live in the Hague—my sister and I."

"Ah! you have a sister!" said Mrs. Vansittart, turning in her chair and looking at him. A woman's

interest in a man's undertaking is invariably centred upon that point where another woman comes into it.

"Yes."

"Unmarried?"

"Yes; Dorothy is unmarried."

Mrs. Vansittart gave several quick little nods of the head.

"I am wondering two things," she said—"whether she is like you, and whether she is interested in this scheme. But I am wondering more than that. Is she pretty, Mr. Roden?"

"Yes, I think she is pretty."

"I am glad of that. I like girls to be pretty. It makes their lives so much more interesting—to the onlooker, *bien entendu*, but not to themselves. The happiest women I have known have been the plain ones. But perhaps your sister will be pretty and happy too. That would be so nice, and so very rare, Mr. Roden. I shall look forward to making her acquaintance. I live in the Hague, you know. I have a house in Park Straat, and I am only at this hotel while the painters are in possession. You will allow me to call on your sister when she joins you?"

"We shall be most gratified," said Roden.

Mrs. Vansittart had risen with a little glance at the clock, and her companion rose also.

"I am greatly interested in your scheme," she said. "Much more than I can tell you. It is so refreshing to find charity in such close connection

with practical common sense. I think you are doing a great work, Mr. Roden."

"I do what I can," he replied, with a bow.

"And Mr. Von Holzen," inquired Mrs. Vansittart, stopping for a moment as she moved towards the doorway, which is large and hung with curtains —"does Mr. Von Holzen work from purely philanthropic motives also?"

"Well—yes, I think so. Though, of course, he, like myself, will be paid a salary. Perhaps, however, he is more interested in malgamite from a scientific point of view."

"Ah, yes, from a scientific point of view, of course. Good night, Mr. Roden."

And she left him.

CHAPTER V.

OUT OF EGYPT.

"Un esclave est moins celui qu'on vend que celui qui se donne."

A SEA fog was blowing across the smooth surface of the Maas where that river is broad and shallow, and a steamer anchored in the channel, grim and motionless, gave forth a grunt of warning from time to time, while a boy with mittened hands rang the bell hung high on the forecastle with a dull monotony. The wind blowing from the south-east drove before it the endless fog which hummed through the rigging, and hung there in little icicles that pointed to leeward. On the bridge of the steamer, looking like a huge woollen barrel surmounted by a comforter and a cap with ear-flaps, the Dutch pilot stood philosophically at his post. Near him the captain, mindful of the company's time-tables, walked with a quick, impatient step. The fog was blowing past at the rate of four or five miles an hour, but the supply of it, emanating from the low lands bordering the Scheldt, seemed to be inexhaustible. This fog, indeed, blows across Holland nearly the whole winter.

The steamer's deck was covered with ice, over which sand had been strewn. The passengers were below in the warm saloon. Only the blue-faced boy at the bell on the forecastle was on the main-deck. At times one of the watch hurried from the galley to the forecastle with a pannikin of steaming coffee. The vessel had been anchored since daybreak, and the sound of other bells and other whistles far and near told that she was not alone in these waters. The distant boom of a steamer creeping cautiously down from Rotterdam seemed to promise that farther inland the fog was thinner. A silence, broken only by the whisper of the wind through the rigging, reigned over all, so that men listened with anticipations of relief for the sound of answering bells. The sky at length grew a little lighter, and presently gaps made their appearance in the fog, allowing peeps over the green and still water.

The captain and the pilot exchanged a few words—the very shortest of consultations. They had been on the bridge together all night, and had said all that there was to be said about wind and weather. The captain gave a sharp order in his gruff voice, and, as if by magic, the watch on deck appeared from all sides. The chief officer emerged from his cabin beneath the wheel-house, and went forward into the fog, turning up his collar. Presently the jerk and clink of the steam-winch told that the anchor was being got home. The fog had

been humoured for six hours, and the time had now come to move on through thick or thin. What should Berlin, Petersburg, Vienna, know of a fog on the Maas? and there were mails and passengers on board this steamer. The clink of the winch brought one of these on deck. Within the high collar of his fur coat, beneath the brim of a felt hat pulled well down, the keen, fair face of Mr. Anthony Cornish came peering up the gangway to the upper bridge. He exchanged a nod with the captain and the pilot; for with these he had already been in conversation at the breakfast-table. He took his station on the bridge behind them, with his hands deep in the pockets of his loose coat, a cigarette between his lips. A shout from the forecastle soon intimated that the anchor was up, and the captain gave the order to the boy at the engine-room telegraph. Through the fog the forms of the three men on the look-out on the forecastle were dimly discernible. The great steamer crept cautiously forward into the fog. The second mate, with his hand on the whistle-line, blared out his warning note every half-minute. A dim shadow loomed up on the port-side, which presently took the form of a great steamer at anchor, and was left behind with a ringing bell and a booming whistle. Another shadow turned out to be a pilot-cutter, and the Dutch pilot exchanged a shouted consultation with an invisible person whom he called "Thou," and who replied to the imperfectly heard

questions with the words, "South East." This shadow also was left behind, faintly calling, "South East," "South East."

"It is a white buoy that I seek," said the pilot, turning to those on the bridge behind him, his jolly red face puckered with anxiety. And quite suddenly the second officer, a bright-red Scotchman, with little blue eyes like tempered gimlets, threw out a red hand and pointing finger.

"There she rides," he said. "There she rides; staarboard your hellum!"

And a full thirty seconds elapsed before any other eyes could pierce that gloom and perceive a great white buoy bowing solemnly towards the steamer like a courtier bidding a sovereign welcome. One voice had seemed to be gradually dominating the din of the many warning whistles that sounded ahead, astern, and all around the steamer. This voice, like that of a strong man knowing his own mind in an assembly of excited and unstable counsellors, had long been raised with a persistence which at last seemed to command all others, and the steamer moved steadily towards it; for it was the siren fog-horn at the pier-head. At one moment it seemed to be quite near, and at the next far away; for the ears, unaided by the eyes, can but imperfectly focus sound or measure its distance.

"At last!" said the captain, suddenly, the anxiety wiped away from his face as if by magic.

"At last, I hear the cranes aworking on the quay."

The purser had come to the bridge, and now approached Cornish.

"Are you going to land them at the Hook or take them on to Rotterdam, sir?" he asked.

"Oh, land 'em at the Hook," replied Cornish, readily, "Have you fed them?"

"Yes, sir. They have had their breakfast—such as it is. Poor eaters I call them, sir."

"Yes," said Cornish, turning and looking at his burly interlocutor. "Yes, I do not suppose they eat much."

The purser shrugged his shoulders, and turned his attention to other affairs, thoughtfully. The little beacon at the head of the pier had suddenly loomed out of the fog not fifty yards away—a very needle in a pottle of hay, which the cunning of the pilot had found.

"Who are they, at any rate—these hundred and twenty ghosts of men?" asked the sailor, abruptly.

"They are malgamite workers," answered Cornish, cheerily. "And I am going to make men of them—not ghosts."

The purser looked at him, laughed in rather a puzzled way, and quitted the bridge. Cornish remained there, taking a quick, intelligent interest in the manœuvres by which the great steamer was being brought alongside the quay. He seemed to have already forgotten the hundred and twenty

men in the second-class cabin. His touch was indeed hopelessly light. He understood how it was that the steamer was made to obey, but he could not himself have brought her alongside. Cornish was a true son of a generation which understands much of many things, but not quite sufficient of any one.

He stood at the upper end of the gangway as the malgamite workers filed off—a sorry crew, narrow-chested, hollow-eyed, with that half-hopeless, half-reckless air that tells of a close familiarity with disease and death. He nodded to them airily as they passed him. Some of them took the trouble to answer his salutation, others seemed indifferent. A few glanced at him with a sort of dull wonder. And indeed this man was not of the material of which great philanthropists are made. He was cheerful and heedless, shallow and superficial.

"Get 'em into the train," he said to an official at his side; and then, seeing that he had not been understood, gave the order glibly enough in another language.

The ill-clad travellers shuffled up the gangway and through the custom-house. Few seemed to take an interest in their surroundings. They exchanged no comments, but walked side by side in silence—dumb and driven animals. Some of them bore signs of disease. A few stumbled as they went. One or two were half blind, with groping hands. That they were of different nationalities was plain enough. Here a Jew from Vienna, with the fear of the Judenhetze in

his eyes, followed on the heels of a tow-headed giant from Stockholm. A cunning cockney touched his hat as he passed, and rather ostentatiously turned to help a white-haired little Italian over the inequalities of the gangway. One thing only they had in common—their deadly industry. One shadow lay over them all—the shadow of death. A momentary gravity passed across Cornish's face. These men were as far removed from him as the crawling beetle is from the butterfly. Who shall say, however, that the butterfly sees nothing but the flowers?

As they passed him, some of them edged away with a dull humility for fear their poor garments should touch his fur coat. One, carrying a bird-cage, half paused, with a sort of pride, that Cornish might obtain a fuller view of a depressed canary. The malgamite workers of this winter's morning on the pier of Hoek were not the interesting industrials of Lady Ferriby's drawing-room. There their lives had been spoken of as short and merry. Here the merriment was scarcely perceptible. The mystery of the dangerous industries is one of those mysteries of human nature which cannot be explained by even the youngest of novelists. That dangerous industries exist we all know and deplore. That the supply of men and women ready to take employment in such industries is practically inexhaustible is a fact worth at least a moment's attention.

Cornish made the necessary arrangements with the railway officials, and carefully counted his charges,

who were already seated in the carriages reserved for them. He must at all events be allowed the virtues of a generation which is eminently practical and capable of overcoming the small difficulties of every-day life. He was quick to decide and prompt to act.

Then he seated himself in a carriage alone, with a sigh of relief at the thought that in a few days he would be back in London. His responsibility ended at the Hague, where he was to hand over the malgamite workers to the care of Roden and Von Holzen. They were rather a depressing set of men, and Holland, as seen from the carriage window—a snow-clad plain intersected by frozen ditches and canals—was no more enlivening. The temperature was deadly cold; the dull houses were rime-covered and forbidding. The malgamite makers had been gathered together from all parts of the world in a home specially organized for them in London. A second detachment were awaiting their orders at Hamburg. But the principal workers were these now placed under Cornish's care.

During the days of their arrival, when they had to be met and housed and cared for, the visionary part of this great scheme had slowly faded before a somewhat grim reality. Joan Ferriby had found the malgamite workers less picturesque than she had anticipated.

"If they only washed," she had confided to Major White, "I am sure they would be easier to deal with."

And after talking French very vivaciously and boldly with a man from Lyons, she hurried back to the West End, and to the numerous engagements which naturally take up much of one's time when Lent is approaching, and dilatory hospitality is stirred up by the startling collapse of the Epiphany Sundays.

Here, however, were the malgamite workers, and they had to be dealt with. It was not quite what many had anticipated, perhaps, and Cornish was looking forward with undisguised pleasure to the moment when he could rid himself of these persons whom Joan had gaily designated as "rather grubsome," and whom he frankly recognized as sordid and uninteresting. He did not even look, as Joan had looked, to the wives and children who were to follow as likely to prove more picturesque and engaging.

The train made its way cautiously over the fog-ridden plain, and Cornish shivered as he looked out of the window. "Schiedam," the porters called. This, Schiedam? A mere village, and yet the name was so familiar. The world seemed suddenly to have grown small and sordid. A few other stations with historic names, and then the Hague.

Cornish quitted his carriage, and found himself shaking hands with Roden, who was awaiting him on the platform, clad in a heavy fur coat. Roden looked clever and capable—cleverer and more capable than Cornish had even suspected—and the organization

seemed perfect. The reserved carriages had been in readiness at the Hook. The officials were prepared.

"I have omnibuses and carts for them and their luggage," were the first words that Roden spoke.

Cornish instinctively placed himself under Roden's orders. The man had risen immensely in his estimation since the arrival in London of the first malgamite maker. The grim reality of the one had enhanced the importance of the other. Cornish had been engaged in so many charities *pour rire* that the seriousness of this undertaking was apt to exaggerate itself in his mind—if, indeed, the seriousness of anything dwelt there at all.

"I counted them all over at the Hook," he said. "One hundred and twenty—pretty average scoundrels."

"Yes; they are not much to look at," answered Roden.

And the two men stood side by side watching the malgamite workers, who now quitted the train and stood huddled together in a dull apathy on the roomy platform.

"But you will soon get them into shape, no doubt," said Cornish, with characteristic optimism. He was essentially of a class that has always some one at hand to whom to relegate tasks which it could do more effectually and more quickly for itself. The secret of human happiness is to be dependent upon as few human beings as possible.

"Oh yes! We shall soon get them into shape—the sea air and all that, you know."

Roden looked at his *protégés* with large, sad eyes, in which there was alike no enthusiasm and no spark of human kindness. Cornish wondered vaguely what he was thinking about. The thoughts were certainly tinged with pessimism, and lacked entirely the blindness of an enthusiasm by which men are urged to endeavour great things for the good of the masses, and to make, as far as a practical human perception may discern, huge and hideous mistakes.

"Von Holzen is down below," said Roden, at length. "As soon as he comes up we will draft them off in batches of ten, and pack them into the omnibuses. The luggage can follow. Ah! Here comes Von Holzen. You don't know him, do you?"

"No; I don't know him."

They both went forward to meet a man of medium height, with square shoulders, and a still, clean-shaven face. Otto von Holzen raised his hat, and remained bare-headed while he shook hands.

"The introduction is unnecessary," he said. "We have worked together for many months—you on the other side of the North Sea, and I on this. And now we have, at all events, something to show for our work."

He had a quick, foreign manner, with a kind smile, and a certain vivacity. This was a different sort of man to Roden—quicker to feel for others, to understand others; capable of greater good, and

possibly of greater evil. He glanced at Cornish, nodded sympathetically, and then turned to look at the malgamite makers. These, standing in a group on the platform, holding in their hands their poor belongings, returned the gaze with interest. The train which had brought them steamed out of the station, leaving the malgamite makers gazing in a dull wonder at the three men into whose hands they had committed their lives.

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE DUNES.

"L'indifference est le sommeil du cœur."

THE village of Scheveningen, as many know, is built on the sand dunes, and only sheltered from the ocean by a sea-wall. A new Scheveningen has sprung up on this sea-wall—a mere terrace of red brick houses, already faded and weather-worn, which stare forlornly at the shallow sea. Inland, except where building enterprise has constructed roads and built villas, are sand dunes. To the south, beyond the lighthouse, are sand dunes. To the north, more especially and most emphatically, are sand dunes as far as the eye may see. This tract of country is a very desert, where thin maritime grasses are shaken by the wind, where suggestive spars lie bleaching, where the sand, driven before the breeze like snow, travels to and fro through all the ages.

This afternoon, the dunes presented as forlorn an appearance as it is possible in one's gloomiest moments to conceive. The fog had, indeed, lifted a little, but a fine rain now drove before the wind, freezing as

it fell, so that the earth was covered by a thin sheet of ice. The short January day was drawing to its close.

To the north of the waterworks, three hundred yards away from that solitary erection, the curious may find to-day a few low buildings clustering round a water-tower. These buildings are of wood, with roofs of corrugated iron ; and when they were newly constructed, not so many years ago, presented a gay enough appearance, with their green shutters and ornamental eaves. The whole was enclosed in a fence of corrugated iron, and approached by a road not too well constructed on its sandy bed.

" We do not want the place to become the object of an excursion for tourists to the Hague," said Roden to Cornish, as they approached the malgamite works in a closed carriage.

Cornish looked out of the window and made no remark. So far as he could see on all sides, there was nothing but sand-hills and grey grass. The road was a narrow one, and led only to the little cluster of houses within the fence. It was a lonely spot, cut off from all communication with the outer world. Men might pass within a hundred yards and never know that the malgamite works existed. The carriage drove through the high gateway into the enclosure. There were a number of cottages, two long, low buildings, and the water-tower.

" You see," said Roden, " we have plenty of room to increase our accommodation when there is need

of it. But we must go slowly and feel our way. It would never do to fail. We have accommodation here for a couple of hundred workers and their families; but in time we shall have five hundred of them in here—all the malgamite workers in the world."

He broke off with a laugh, and looked round him. There was a ring in his voice suggestive of a keen excitement. Could Percy Roden, after all, be an enthusiast? Cornish glanced at him uneasily. In Cornish's world sincere enthusiasm was so rare that it was never well received.

Roden's manner changed again, however, and he explained the plan of the little village with his usual half-indifferent air.

"These two buildings are the factories," he said. "In them three hundred men can work at once. There we shall build sheds for the storage of the raw material. Here we shall erect a warehouse. But I do not anticipate that we shall ever have much malgamite on our hands. We shall turn over our money very quickly."

Cornish listened with the respectful attention which business details receive nowadays from those whose birth and education unfit them for such pursuits. It was obvious that he did not fully understand the terms of which Roden made use; but he tapped his smart boot with his cane, gave a quick nod of the head, and looked intelligently around him. He had a certain respect for Percy Roden, while that

philanthropist did not perhaps appear quite at his best in his business moments.

"And do you—and that foreign individual, Mr. Von Holzen—live inside this—zareba?" he asked.

"No; Von Holzen lives as yet in Scheveningen, in a hotel there. And I have taken a small villa on the dunes, with my sister to keep house for me."

"Ah! I did not know you had a sister," said Cornish, still looking about him with intelligent ignorance. "Does she take an interest in the malgamite scheme?"

"Only so far as it affects me," replied Roden. "She is a good sister to me. The house is between the water-works and the steam-tram station. We will call in on our way back, if you care to."

"I should like nothing better," replied Cornish, conventionally, and they continued their inspection of the little colony. The arrangements were as simple as they were effective. Either Roden or Von Holzen certainly possessed the genius of organization. In one of the cottages a cold collation was set out on two long tables. There was a choice of wines, and notably some bottles of champagne on a side table.

"For the journalists," explained Roden. "I have a number of them coming this afternoon to witness the arrival of the first batch of malgamite makers. There is nothing like judicious advertisement. We have invited a number of newspaper correspondents. We give them champagne and pay their expenses. If you will be a little friendly, they would like it immensely.

They, of course, know who you are. A little flattery, you understand."

"Flattery and champagne," laughed Cornish—"the two principal ingredients of popularity."

"I have here a number of photographs," continued Roden, "taken by a good man in the neighbourhood. He has thrown in a view of the sea at the back, you see. It is not there; but he has put in the sky and sea from another plate, he tells me, to make a good picture of it. We shall send them to the principal illustrated papers."

"And I suppose," said Cornish, with his gay laugh, "that some of the journalists will throw in background also."

"Of course," answered Roden, gravely. "And the sentimentalists will be satisfied. The sentimentalists never stop at providing necessaries; they want to pamper. It will please them immensely to think that the malgamite makers, who have been collected from the slums of the world, have a sea view and every modern luxury."

"We must humour them," said Cornish, practically. "We should not get far without them."

At this moment the sound of wheels made them both turn towards the entrance. It was an omnibus—the best omnibus with the finest horses—which brought the journalists. These gentlemen now descended from the vehicle and came towards the cottage, where Cornish and Roden awaited them. They were what is euphemistically called a little mixed.

Some were too well dressed, others too badly. But all carried themselves with an air that bespoke a consciousness of greatness not unmingled with good-fellowship. The leader, a stout man, shook hands affably with Cornish, who assumed his best and most gracious manner.

"Aha! Here we are," he said, rubbing his hands together and looking at the champagne.

Then somehow Cornish came to the front and Roden retired into the background. It was Cornish who opened the champagne and poured it into their glasses. It was Cornish who made the best jokes, and laughed the loudest at the journalistic quips fired off by his companions. Cornish seemed to understand the guests better than did Roden, who was inclined to be stiff towards them. Those who are assured of their position are not always thinking about it. Men who stand much upon their dignity have not, as a rule, much else to stand upon.

"Here's to you, sir," cried the stout newspaper man, with upraised glass and a heart full of champagne. "Here's to you—whoever you are. And now to business. Perhaps you'll trot us round the works."

This Cornish did with much success. He then stood beside the correspondents while the malgamite workers descended from the omnibus and took possession of their new quarters. He provided the journalists with photographs and a short printed

account of the malgamite trade, which had been prepared by Von Holzen. It was finally Cornish who packed them into the omnibus in high good-humour, and sent them back to the Hague.

"Do not forget the sentiment," he called out after them. "Remember it is a charity."

The malgamite workers were left to the care of Von Holzen, who had made all necessary preparations for their reception.

"You are a cleverer man than I thought you," said Roden to Cornish, as they walked over the dunes together in the dusk towards the Rodens' house. And it was difficult to say whether Roden was pleased or not. He did not speak much during the walk, and was evidently wrapped in deep thought.

Cornish was light and inconsequent as usual. "We shall soon raise more money," he said. "We shall have malgamite balls, and malgamite bazaars, malgamite balloon ascents, if that is not flying too high."

The Villa des Dunes stands, as its name implies, among the sand hills, facing south and west. It is upon an elevation, and therefore enjoys a view of the sea, and, inland, of the spires of the Hague. The garden is an old one, and there are quiet nooks in it where the trees have grown to a quite respectable stature. Holland is so essentially a tidy country that nothing old or moss-grown is tolerated. One wonders where all the rubbish of the centuries

has been hidden; for all the ruins have been decently cleared away, and cities that teem with historical interest seem, with a few exceptions, to have been built last year. The garden of the Villa des Dunes was therefore more remarkable for cleanliness than luxuriance. The house itself was uninteresting, and resembled a thousand others on the coast in that it was more comfortable than it looked. A suggestion of warmth and lamp-light filtered through the drawn curtains.

Roden led the way into the house, admitting himself with a latch-key. "Dorothy," he cried, as soon as the door was closed behind them—the two tall men in their heavy coats almost filled the little hall—"Dorothy, where are you?"

The atmosphere of the house—that subtle odour which is characteristic of all dwellings—was pleasant. One felt that there were flowers in the rooms, and that tea was in course of preparation.

The door on the left-hand side of the hall was opened, and a small woman appeared there. She was essentially small,—a little upright figure with bright brown hair, a good complexion, and gay, sparkling eyes.

"I have brought Mr. Cornish," explained Roden. "We are frozen, and want some tea."

Dorothy Roden came forward and shook hands with Cornish. She looked up at him, taking him all in, in one quick intuitive glance, from his smooth head to his neat boots.

"It is horribly cold," she said. One cannot always be original and sparkling, and it is wiser not to try too persistently. She turned and re-entered the drawing-room, with Cornish following her. The room itself was prettily furnished in the Dutch fashion, and there were flowers. Dorothy Roden's manner was that of a woman, no longer in her first girlhood, who had seen men and cities. She was better educated than her brother; she was probably cleverer. She had, at all events, the subtle air of self-restraint that marks those women whose lives are passed in the society of a man mentally inferior to themselves. Of course all women are in a sense doomed to this—according to their own thinking.

"Percy said that he would probably bring you in to tea," said Miss Roden, "and that probably you would be tired out."

"Thanks; I am not tired. We had a good passage, and everything has run as smoothly. Do you take an active interest in us?"

Miss Roden paused in the action of pouring out tea, and looked across at her interlocutor.

"Not an active one," she answered, with a momentary gravity; and, after a minute, glanced at Cornish's face again.

"It is going to be a big thing," he said enthusiastically. "My cousin Joan Ferriby is working hard at it in London. You do not know her, I suppose?"

"I was at school with Joan," replied Miss Roden, with her soft laugh. "And we took a school-girl oath to write to each other every week when we parted. We kept it up—for a fortnight."

Cornish's smooth face betrayed no surprise, although he had concluded that Miss Roden was years older than Joan.

"Perhaps," he said, with ready tact, "you do not take an interest in the same things as Joan. In what may be called new things—not clothes, I mean. In factory girls' feather clubs, for instance, or haberdashers' assistants, or women's rights, or anything like that."

"No; I am not clever enough for anything like that. I am profoundly ignorant about women's rights, and do not even know what I want, or ought to want."

Roden, who had approached the table, laughed, and taking his tea, went and sat down near the fire. He, at all events, was tired and looked worn—as if his responsibilities were already beginning to weigh upon him. Cornish, too, had come forward, and, cup in hand, stood looking down at Miss Roden with a doubtful air.

"I always distrust women who say that," he said. "One naturally suspects them of having got what they want by some underhand means—and of having abandoned the rest of their sex. This is an age of amalgamation; is not that so, Roden?"

He turned and sat down near to Dorothy. Roden

thus appealed to, made some necessary remark, and then lapsed into a thoughtful silence. It seemed that Cornish was quite capable, however, of carrying on the conversation by himself.

"Do you know nothing about your wrongs, either?" he asked Dorothy.

"Nothing," she replied. "I have not even the wit to know that I have any."

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "No wonder Joan ceased writing to you. You are a most suspicious case, Miss Roden. Of course you have righted your wrongs—*sub rosa*—and leave other women to manage their own affairs. That is what is called a blackleg. You are untrue to the Union. In these days we all belong to some cause or another. We cannot help it, and recent legislation adds daily to the difficulty. We must either be rich or poor. At present the only way to live at peace with one's poorer neighbours is to submit to a certain amount of robbery. But some day the classes must combine to make a stand against the masses. The masses are already combined. We must either be a man or a woman. Some day the men must combine against the women, who are already united behind a vociferous vanguard. May I have some more tea?"

"I am afraid I have been left behind in the general advance," said Miss Roden, taking his cup.

"I am afraid so. Of course I don't know where

we are advancing to——" He paused and drank the tea slowly. "No one knows that," he added.

"Probably to a point where we shall all suddenly begin fighting for ourselves again."

"That is possible," he said gravely, setting down his cup. "And now I must find my way back to the Hague. Good night."

"He is clever," said Dorothy, when Roden returned after having shown Cornish the way.

"Yes," answered Roden, without enthusiasm.

"You do not seem to be pleased at the thought," she said carelessly.

"Oh—it will be all right! If his cleverness runs in the right direction."

CHAPTER VII.

OFFICIAL.

"One may be so much a man of the world as to be nothing in the world."

POLITICAL Economy will some day have to recognize Philanthropy as a possible—nay, a certain stumbling-block in the world's progress towards that millennium when Supply and Demand shall sit down together in peace. Charity is certainly sowing seed into the ridges of time which will bear startling fruit in the future. For Charity does not hesitate to close up an industry or interfere with a trade that supplies thousands with their daily bread. Thus the Malgamite scheme so glibly inaugurated by Lord Ferriby in his drawing-room bore fruit within a week in a quarter to which probably few concerned had ever thought of casting an eye. The price of a high-class tinted paper fell in all the markets of the world. This paper could only be manufactured with a large addition of malgamite to its other components. In what may be called the prospectus of the Malgamite

scheme it was stated that this great charity was inaugurated for the purpose of relieving the distress of the malgamiters—one of the industrial scandals of the day—by enabling these afflicted men to make their deadly product at a cheaper rate and without danger to themselves. This prospectus naturally came to the hands of those most concerned, namely, the manufacturers of coloured papers and the brokers who supply those manufacturers with their raw material.

Thus Lord Ferriby, beaming benignantly from a bower of chrysanthemums on a certain evening one winter not so many years ago, set rolling a small stone upon a steep hill. So, in fact, wags the world; and none of us may know when the echo of a careless word will cease vibrating in the hearts of some that hear.

The malgamite trade was what is called a *close* one—that is to say, that this product passed out into the world through the hands of a few brokers, and these brokers were powerless, in face of Lord Ferriby's announcement, to prevent the price of malgamite from falling. As this fell so fell the prices of the many kinds of paper which could not be manufactured without it. Thus indirectly, Lord Ferriby, with that obtuseness which very often finds itself in company with a highly developed philanthropy, touched the daily lives of thousands and thousands of people. And he did not know it. And Tony Cornish knew it not. And Joan

and the subscribers never dreamt or thought of such a thing.

The paper market became what is called sensitive—that is to say, prices rose and fell suddenly without apparent reason. Some men made money and others lost it. Presently, however—that is to say, in the month of March—two months after Tony Cornish had safely conveyed his malgamite makers to their new home on the sand dunes of Scheveningen—the paper markets of the world began to settle down again, and steadier prices ruled. This could be traced—as all commercial changes may be traced—to the original flow at one of the fountain-heads of supply and demand. It arose from the simple fact that a broker in London had bought some of the new malgamite—the Scheveningen malgamite—and had issued it to his clients, who said that it was good. He had, moreover, bought it cheaper. In a couple of days all the world—all the world concerned in the matter—knew of it. Such is commerce at the end of the century.

And Cornish, casually looking in at the little office of the Malgamite Charity, where a German clerk recommended by Herr von Holzen kept the books of the scheme, found his table littered with telegrams. Tony Cornish had a reputation for being clever. He was, as a matter of fact, intelligent. The world nearly always mistakes intelligence for cleverness, just as it nearly always mistakes laughter for happiness. He was, however,

clever enough to have found out during the last two months that the Malgamite scheme was a bigger thing than either he or his uncle had ever imagined.

Many questions had arisen during those two months of Cornish's honorary secretaryship of the charity which he had been unable to answer, and which he had been obliged to refer to Roden and Von Holzen. These had replied readily, and the matter as solved by them seemed simple enough. But each question seemed to have side issues—indeed, the whole scheme appeared suddenly to bristle with side issues, and Tony Cornish began to find himself getting really interested in something at last.

The telegrams were not alone upon his office table. There were letters as well. It was a nice little office, furnished by Joan with a certain originality which certainly made it different from any other office in Westminster. It had, moreover, the great recommendation of being above a Ladies' Tea Association, so that afternoon tea could be easily procured. The German clerk quite counted on receiving three half-holidays a week, and Joan brought her friends to tea, and her mother to chaperon. These little tea-parties became quite notorious, and there was a question of a cottage piano, which was finally abandoned in favour of a banjo. It happened to be a wire-puzzle winter, and Cornish had the best collection of rings on impossible wire mazes, and glass beads strung upon inter-

twisted hooks, in Westminster, if not, indeed, in the whole of London. Then, of course, there were the committee meetings—that is to say, the meeting of the lady committees of the bazaar and ball sub-committees. The wire puzzles and the association tea were an immense feature of these.

Cornish was quite accustomed to finding a number of letters awaiting him, and had been compelled to buy a waste-paper basket of abnormal dimensions—so many moribund charities cast envious eyes upon the Malgamite scheme, and wondered how it was done, and, on the chance of it, offered Cornish honourable honorary posts. But the telegrams had been few, and nearly all from Roden. There was a letter from Roden this morning.

"DEAR CORNISH" (he wrote),—

"You will probably receive applications from malgamite workers in different parts of the world for permission to enter our works. Accept them all, and arrange for their enlistment as soon as possible.

"Yours in haste,

"P. R."

Percy Roden was usually in haste, and wrote a bad letter in a beautiful handwriting.

Cornish turned to the telegrams. They were one and all applications from malgamite makers—from Venice to Valparaiso—to be enrolled in the Sche-

veningen group. He was still reading them when Lord Ferriby came into the little office. His lordship was wearing a new fancy waistcoat. It was the month of April—the month assuredly of fancy waistcoats throughout all nature. Lord Ferriby was, as usual, rather pleased with himself. He had walked down Piccadilly with great effect, and a bishop had bowed to him, recognizing, in a sense, a lay bishop.

"What have you got there, Tony?" he asked affably, laying his smart walking-stick on an inlaid bureau, which was supposed to be his, and was always closed, and had nothing in it.

"Telegrams," answered Cornish, "from malgamite makers, who want to join the works at Scheveningen. Seventy-six of them. I don't quite understand this business."

"Neither do I," admitted Lord Ferriby, in a voice which clearly indicated that if he only took the trouble he could understand anything. "But I fancy it is one of the biggest things in charity that has ever been started."

In the company of men, and especially of young men, Lord Ferriby allowed himself a little licence in speech. He at times almost verged on the slangy, which is, of course, quite correct and *de haut ton*, and he did not want to be taken for an old buffer, as were his contemporaries. Therefore he called himself an old buffer whenever he could. *Qui s'excuse s'accuse.*

"Of course," he added, "we must take the poor fellows."

Without comment, Cornish handed him Roden's letter, and while Lord Ferriby read it, employed himself in making out a list of the names and addresses of the applicants. Cornish was, in fact, rising to the occasion. In other circumstances Anthony Cornish might with favourable influence—say that of a Scottish head clerk—have been made into what is called a good business man. Without any training whatever, and with an education which consisted only of a smattering of the classics and a rigid code of honour, he usually perceived what it was wise to do. Some people call this genius; others, luck.

"I see," said Lord Ferriby, "that Roden is of the same opinion as myself. A shrewd fellow, Roden." And he pulled down his fancy waistcoat.

"Then I may write, or telegraph, to these men, and tell them to come?" asked Cornish.

"Most certainly, my dear Anthony. We will collect them, or muster them, as White calls it, in London, and then send them to Scheveningen, as before, when Roden and Herr von Holzen are ready for them. Send a note to White, whose department this mustering is. As a soldier he understands the handling of a body of men. You and I are more competent to deal with a sum of money."

Lord Ferriby glanced towards the door to make

sure that it was open, so that the German clerk in the outer office should lose nothing that could only be for his good — might, in fact, pick up a few crumbs from the richly stored table of a great man's mind.

Lord Ferriby leisurely withdrew his gloves and laid them on the inlaid bureau. He had the physique of a director of public companies, and the grave manner that impresses shareholders. He talked of the weather, drew Cornish's attention to a blot of ink on the high-art wall-paper, and then put on his gloves again, well pleased with himself and his morning's work.

"Everything appears to be in order, my dear Anthony," he said. "So there is nothing to keep me here any longer."

"Nothing," replied Cornish; and his lordship departed.

Cornish remained until it was time to go across St. James's Park to his club to lunch. He answered a certain number of letters himself, the others he handed over to the German clerk—a man with all the virtues, smooth, upright hair, and a dreamy eye. The malgamite makers were bidden to come as soon as they liked. After luncheon Cornish had to hurry back to Great George Street. This was one of his busy days. At four o'clock there was to be a meeting of the floor committee of the approaching ball, and Cornish remembered that he had been specially told to get a

new bass string for the banjo. The Hon. Rupert Dalkyn had promised to come, but had vowed that he would not touch the banjo again unless it had new strings. So Cornish bought the bass string at the Army and Navy Stores, and the first preparation for the meeting of the floor committee was the tuning of the banjo by the German clerk.

There were, of course, flowers to be bought and arranged *tant bien que mal* in empty ink-stands, a conceit of Joan's, who refused to spend the fund money in any ornament less serious, while she quite recognized the necessity for flowers on the table of a mixed committee.

The Hon. Rupert was the first to arrive. He was very small and neat and rather effeminate. The experienced could tell at a glance that he came from a fighting stock. He wore a grave and rather preoccupied air. He sat down on the arm of a chair and looked sadly into the fire, while his lips moved.

"Got something on your mind?" asked Cornish, who was putting the finishing touches to the arrangement of the room.

"Yes, a new song, composed for the occasion. 'The Maudlin Malgamite'; like to hear it?"

"Well, I would rather wait. I think I hear a carriage at the door," said Cornish, hastily.

Rupert Dalkyn had to be elected to the floor committee because he was Mrs. Courteville's brother, and Mrs. Courteville was the best chaperon in Lon-

don. She was not only a widow, but her husband had been killed in rather painful circumstances.

"Poor dear," the people said, when she had done something perhaps a little unusual—"poor dear; you know her husband was killed."

So the late Courteville, in his lone grave by the banks of the Ogowe River, watched over his wife's welfare, and made quite a nice place for her in London society.

Rupert himself had been intended for the Church, but had at Cambridge developed such an exquisite sense of humour and so killing a power of mimicry that no one of the dons was safe, and his friends told him that he really mustn't. So he didn't. Since then, Rupert had, to tell the truth, done nothing. The exquisite sense of humour had also slightly evaporated. People said, "Oh yes, very funny," than which nothing is more fatal to humour; and elderly ladies smiled a pinched smile at one side of their lips. It is so difficult to see a joke through those long-handled eye-glasses.

Cornish was quite right when he said that he had heard a carriage, for presently the door opened and Mrs. Courteville came in. She was small and slight—"a girlish figure" her maid told her—and well dressed. She was just at that age when she did not look it—at an age, moreover, when some women seem to combine a maximum of experience with a minimum of thought. But who are we to pick holes in our neighbours' garments? If any of

us is quite sure that he is not doing more harm than good in the world, let him by all means throw stones at Mrs. Courteville.

Joan arrived next, accompanied by Lady Ferriby, who knew that if she stayed at home she would only have to give tea to a number of people towards whom she did not feel kindly enough disposed to reconcile herself to the expense. Joan glanced hastily from Mrs. Courteville to Tony. She had noticed that Mrs. Courteville always arrived early at the floor committee meetings when these were held at the Malgamite office or in Cornish's rooms. Joan wondered, while Mrs. Courteville was kissing her, whether the widow had come with her brother or before him.

"Has he not made the room look pretty with that mimosa?" asked Mrs. Courteville, vivaciously. People did not know how matters stood between Joan Ferriby and Tony Cornish, and always wanted to know. That is why Mrs. Courteville said "he" only when she drew Joan's attention to the flowers.

The meeting may best be described as lively. We belong, however, to an eminently practical generation, and some business was really transacted. The night for the Malgamite ball was fixed, and a list of stewards drawn up; and then the Hon. Rupert played the banjo.

Lady Ferriby had some calls to pay, so Cornish volunteered to walk across the park with Joan, who had a healthy love of exercise. They talked of

various matters, and of course returned again and again to the Malgamite affairs.

"By the way," said Joan, at the corner of Cambridge Terrace, "I had a letter this morning from Dorothy Roden. I was at school with her, you know, and never dreamt that Mr. Roden was her brother. In fact, I had nearly forgotten her existence. She is coming across for the ball. She says she saw you when you were at the Hague. You never mentioned her, Tony."

"Didn't I? She is not interested in the Malgamite scheme, you know. And nobody who is not interested in that is worth mentioning."

They walked on in silence for a few minutes. Then Cornish asked a question.

"What sort of person was she at school?"

"Oh, she was a frivolous sort of girl—never took anything seriously, you know. That is why she is not interested in the Malgamite, I suppose."

"I suppose so," said Tony Cornish.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SEAMY SIDE.

"For this is death, and the sole death,
When a man's loss comes to him from his gain."

MRS. VANSITTART told Roden that her house was in Park Straat in the Hague. But she did not mention that it was at the corner of Oranje Straat, which makes all the difference. For Park Straat is long, and the further end of it—the extremity furthest removed from the Royal Palace—is less desirable than the neighbourhood of the Vyverberg. Mrs. Vansittart's house was in the most desirable part of a most desirable little city. She was surrounded with houses inhabited by people bearing names well known in history. These people are, moreover, of a fascinating cosmopolitanism. They come from all parts of the world, in an ancestral sense. There are, for instance, Dutch people living here whose names are Scottish. There are others of French extraction, others again whose forefathers came to Holland with the Don John of the religious wars whose history reads like a romance.

Outwardly Mrs. Vansittart's house was of dark

red brick, with stone facings, and probably belonged to that period which in England is called Tudor. Inwardly the house was as comfortable as thick carpets and rich curtains and beautiful carvings could make it. The Dutch are pre-eminently the flower-growers of the world, and the observant traveller walking along Oranje Straat may note even in midwinter that the flowers in the windows are changed each day. In this, as in other *menus plaisirs*, Mrs. Vansittart had assumed the ways of the country of her adoption. For Holland suggests to the inquiring mind an elderly gentleman, now getting a little stout, who, after a wild youth, is beginning to appreciate the blessings of repose and comfort; who, having laid by a small sufficiency, sits peaceably by the fire, and reflects upon the days that are no more.

It was Mrs. Vansittart's pleasant habit to surround herself with every comfort. She was an eminently self-respecting person — of that self-respect which denies itself nothing except excess. She liked to be well dressed, well housed, well served. She possessed money, and with it she bought these adjuncts, which in a minor degree are within the reach of nearly everybody, though few have the wit to value them. She was not, however, a vociferously contented woman. Like many another, she probably wanted something that money could not buy.

Mrs. Vansittart, in fulfilment of her promise to

Percy Roden, called on Dorothy at the Villa des Dunes, who in due course came to the house at the corner of Park Straat and Oranje Straat to return the visit. Dorothy had been out when Mrs. Vansittart called, but she thought she knew from her brother's description what sort of woman to expect. For Dorothy Roden had been educated abroad, and was not without knowledge of a certain class of English lady to be met with on the Continent, who is always well connected, invariably idle, and usually refers gracefully to a great sorrow in the past.

But Dorothy knew, as soon as she saw Mrs. Vansittart, that she had formed an entirely erroneous conception. This was not the sort of woman to seek the admiration of the first-comer, and Percy Roden had allowed his sister to surmise that, whether it had been sought or not, Mrs. Vansittart had certainly been accorded his highest admiration.

"It is good of you to return my call so soon," she said, in a friendly voice. "You have walked, I suppose, all the way from the Villa des Dunes. English girls are such great walkers now—a most excellent thing. I belong to the semi-generation older than yours, which preferred a carriage. I am an atrocious walker. You are not at all like your brother." And she threw back her head and looked speculatively at her visitor. "Sit down," she said, with a laugh. "You probably came here harbouring a prejudice against me. One should never get to know

a woman through her men-folk. That is a rule almost without exception; you may take it from one who is many years older than you. But—well, *nous verrons*. Perhaps we are the exception."

"I hope so," answered Dorothy, who was ready enough of speech. "At all events, all that Percy told me made me anxious to meet you. It is rather lonely, you know, at the Villa des Dunes. You see, Percy is engaged all day with his malgamiters. And, of course, we know no one here yet."

"There is Herr von Holzen," suggested Mrs. Vansittart, ringing the bell for tea.

"Oh yes. The man who is associated with Percy at the works? I do not know him. Percy has not brought him to the villa."

"Ah! is that so? That is nice of your brother. Sometimes men, you know, make use of their wives or their sisters to help them in their business relationships. I have known a man use his pretty daughter to gain a client. Beauty levels all, you see. Not nice, no; I suppose Herr von Holzen, is—well—let us call him a foreign savant. Such a nice broad term, you know; covers such a plentiful lack of soap." And she laughed easily, with eyes that were quite grave and alert.

"My brother does not say much about him," answered Dorothy Roden. "Percy never does tell me much of his affairs, and I am not sorry. I am sure I should not understand them. Stocks and shares and freights and things. I never quite

know whether a freight is part of a ship; do you?"

"No. There are so many things more useful to know, are there not?—things about people and human nature, for instance."

"Yes," said Dorothy, looking at her companion thoughtfully—"yes."

And Mrs. Vansittart returned that thoughtful glance. "And the other man," she said suddenly, "Mr.—Cornish—do you know him?"

"He called at the Villa des Dunes. My brother brought him in to tea the evening of arrival of the first batch of malgamiters," replied Dorothy.

"Mr. Cornish interests me," said Mrs. Vansittart. "I knew him when he was a boy—or little more than a boy. He came to Weimar with a tutor to learn German when I happened to be living there. I have heard of him from time to time since. One sees his name in the society papers, you know. He is one of those persons of whom something is expected by his friends—not by himself. The young man who expects something of himself is usually disappointed. Have you ever noticed in the biographies of great men, Miss Roden, that people nearly always began to expect something of them when they were quite young? As if they were cast in a different mould from the very first. Really great men, I mean, not the fashionable pianist or novelist of the hour whose portrait is in every illustrated journal for perhaps two months, and then he is forgotten."

Mrs. Vansittart spoke quickly in a foreign manner, asking with a certain vivacity questions which required no answer. Dorothy Roden was not slow of speech, but she touched topics with less airiness. Her mind seemed a trifle insular in its tendencies. One topic attracted her, and the rest were set aside.

"Why does Mr. Cornish interest you?" she asked.

Mrs. Vansittart shrugged her shoulders and leant back in her deep chair.

"He strikes me as a person with infinite capacity for holding his cards. That is all. But perhaps he has no good cards in his hand? Nothing but rubbish—the twos and threes of ordinary drawing-room smartness—and never a trump. Who can tell? *Qui vivra verra,* Miss Roden. It may not be in my time that the world shall hear of Tony Cornish—the real world, not the journalistic world, I mean. He may ripen slowly, and I shall be dead. I am getting elderly. How old do you think I am, Miss Roden?"

"Thirty-five," replied Dorothy; and Mrs. Vansittart turned sharply to look at her.

"Ah!" she said, slowly and thoughtfully. "Yes, you are quite right. That is my age. And I suppose I look it. I suppose others would have guessed with equal facility, but not everybody would have had the honesty to say what they thought."

Dorothy laughed and changed colour. "I said it without thinking," she answered. "I hope you do not mind."

"No, I do not mind," said Mrs. Vansittart, looking out of the window. "But we were talking of Mr. Cornish."

"Yes," answered Dorothy, buttoning her glove and glancing at the clock. "Yes; but I must not talk any longer or I shall be late, and my brother expects to find me at home when he returns from the works."

She rose and shook hands, looking Mrs. Vansittart in the eyes. When Dorothy had gone, the lady of the house stood for a minute looking at the closed door.

"I wonder what she thinks of me?" she said.

And Dorothy Roden, walking down Park Straat, was doing the same. She was wondering what she thought of Mrs. Vansittart.

Although it was the month of April, the winter mists still rose at evening and swept seawards from the marshes of Leyden. The trees had scarcely begun to break into bud, for it had been a cold spring, and the ice was floating lazily on the canal as Dorothy walked along its bank. The Villa des Dunes was certainly somewhat lonely, standing as it did a couple of hundred yards back from a sandy road—one of the many leading from the Hague to Scheveningen. Between the villa and the road the dunes had scarcely been molested, except, indeed, to cut a narrow roadway to the house. When Dorothy reached home, she found that her brother had not yet returned. She looked at the clock. He was

later than usual. The malgamite works had during the last few weeks been absorbing more and more of his attention. When he returned home, tired, in the evening, he was not communicative. As for Otto von Holzen, he never showed his face outside the works now, but seemed to live the life of a recluse within the iron fence that surrounded the little colony.

Percy Roden had not returned to the Villa des Dunes at the usual hour because he had other work to do. Von Holzen and he were now standing in one of the little huts in silence. The light of the setting sun glowed through the window upon their faces, upon the bare walls of the room, rendered barer and in no way beautified by a terrible German print purporting to represent the features of Prince Bismarck.

Von Holzen stood, with his hands clasped behind his back, and looked out of the window across the dreary dunes. Roden stood beside him, slouching and heavy-shouldered, with his hands in his trouser pockets. His lower lip was pressed inward between his teeth. His eyes were drawn and anxious.

On the bed, between the two men, lay a third—an old-looking youth with lank red hair. It was the story of St. Jacob Straat over again, and it was new to Percy Roden, who could not turn his eyes elsewhere. The man was dying. He was a Pole who understood no word of English. Indeed, these

three men had no language in common in which to make themselves understood.

"Can you do nothing at all?" asked Roden, for the second or third time.

"Nothing," answered Von Holzen, without turning round. "He was a doomed man when he came here."

The man lay on the bed and stared at Von Holzen's back. Perhaps that was the reason why Von Holzen so persistently looked out of the window. The work-hours were over, and from some neighbouring cottage the sounds of a concertina come on the quiet air. The musician had chosen a popular music-hall song, which he played over and over again with a maddening pertinacity. Roden bit his lip, and frowned at each repetition of the opening bars. Von Holzen, with a still, pale face and stern eyes, seemed to hear nothing. He had no nerves. At times he twisted his lips, moistening them with his tongue, and suppressed an impatient sigh. The man was a long time in dying. They had been waiting there two hours. This little incident had to be passed over as quietly as possible on account of the feelings of the concertina player and the others.

The door stood ajar, and in the adjoining room a professional nurse, in cap and apron, sat reading a German newspaper. This also was a bedroom. The cottage was, in point of fact, the hospital of the malgamite workers. The nurse whose services

had not hitherto been wanted, had since the inauguration of the works spent some pleasant weeks at a pension at Scheveningen. She read her newspaper very philosophically, and waited.

Roden it was who watched the patient. The dying man never heeded him, but looked persistently towards Von Holzen. The expression of his eyes indicated that if they had had a language in common he would have spoken to him. Roden saw the direction of the man's glance, and perhaps read its meaning. For Percy Roden was handicapped with that greatest of all drags on a successful career—a soft heart. He could speak harshly enough of the malgamiters as a class, but he was drawn towards this dumb individual, with a strong desire to effect the impossible. Von Holzen had not promised that there should be no deaths. He had merely undertaken to reduce the dangers of the malgamite industry gradually and steadily until they ceased to exist. He had, moreover, the strength of mind to give to this incident its proper weight in the balance of succeeding events. He was not, in a word, handicapped as was his colleague.

The sun set beyond the quiet sea, and over the sand dunes the shades of evening crept towards the west. The outline of Prince Bismarck's iron face faded slowly in the gathering darkness, until it was nothing but a shadow in a frame on the bare wall. The concertina player had laid aside his instrument. A sudden silence fell upon land and sea.

Von Holzen turned sharply on his heel and leant over the bed.

"Come along," he said to Roden, with averted eyes. "It is all over. There is nothing more for us to do here."

With a backward glance towards the bed, Roden followed his companion out of the room into the adjoining apartment where the nurse was sitting, and where their coats and hats lay on the bed. Von Holzen spoke to the woman in German.

"So!" she answered, with a mild interest, and folded the paper.

The two men went out into the keen air together, and did not look towards each other or speak. Perhaps they knew that if there is any difficulty in speaking of a subject it is better to keep silence. They crossed the sandy space between this cottage and the others grouped round the factory like tents around their headquarters. One of these huts was Von Holzen's—a three-roomed building where he worked and slept. Its windows looked out upon the factory, and commanded the only entrance to the railed enclosure within which the whole colony was confined. It was Von Holzen's habit to shut himself within his cottage for days together, living there in solitude like some crustacean within its shell. At the door he turned, with his fingers on the handle.

"You must not worry yourself about this," he said to Roden, with averted eyes. "It cannot be helped, you know."

"No; I know that."

"And of course we must keep our own counsel. Good night, Roden."

"Of course. Good night, Von Holzen."

And Percy Roden passed through the gateway, walking slowly across the dunes towards his own house; while Von Holzen watched him from the window of the little three-roomed cottage.

CHAPTER IX.

A SHADOW FROM THE PAST.

"Le plus sur moyen d'arriver à son but c'est de ne pas faire de rencontres en chemin."

"YES, it was long ago—'lang, lang izt's her'—you remember the song Frau Neumayer always sang. So long ago, Mr. Cornish, that—— Well, it must be Mr. Cornish, and not Tony."

Mrs. Vansittart leant back in her comfortable chair and looked at her visitor with observant eyes. Those who see the most are they who never appear to be observing. It is fatal to have others say that one is so sharp, and people said as much of Mrs. Vansittart, who had quick dark eyes and an alert manner.

"Yes," answered Cornish, "it is long ago, but not so long as all that."

His smooth fair face was slightly troubled by the knowledge that the recollections to which she referred were those of the Weimar days when she who was now a widow had been a young married woman. Tony Cornish had also been young in those days, and impressionable. It was before the

world had polished his surface bright and hard. And the impression left of the Mrs. Vansittart of Weimar was that she was one of the rare women who marry *pour le bon motif*. He had met her by accident in the streets of the Hague a few hours ago, and having learnt her address, had, in duty bound, called at the house at the corner of Park Straat and Oranje Straat at the earliest calling hour.

"I am not ignorant of your history since you were at Weimar," said the lady, looking at him with an air of almost maternal scrutiny.

"I have no history," he replied. "I never had a past even, a few years ago, when every man who took himself seriously had at least one."

He spoke as he had learnt to speak, with the surface of his mind—with the object of passing the time and avoiding topics that might possibly be painful. Many who appear to be egotistical must assuredly be credited with this good motive. One is, at all events, safe in talking of one's self. Sufficient for the social day is the effort to avoid glancing at the cupboard where our neighbour keeps his skeleton.

A silence followed Cornish's heroic speech, and it was perhaps better to face it than stave it off.

"Yes," said Mrs. Vansittart, at the end of that pause, "I am a widow and childless. I see the questions in your face."

Cornish gave a little nod of the head, and looked out of the window. Mrs. Vansittart was only a year older than himself, but the difference in their life and

experience, when they had learnt to know each other at Weimar, had in some subtle way augmented the seniority.

"Then you never——" he said, and paused.

"No," she answered lightly. "So I am what the world calls independent, you see. No encumbrance of any sort."

Again he nodded without speaking.

"The line between an encumbrance and a purpose is not very clearly defined, is it?" she said lightly; and then added a question, "What are you doing in the Hague—Malgamite?"

"Yes," he answered, in surprise, "Malgamite."

"Oh, I know all about it," laughed Mrs. Vansittart. "I see Dorothy Roden at least once a week."

"But she takes no part in it."

"No; she takes no part in it, *mon ami*, except in so far as it affects her brother and compels her to live in a sad little villa on the Dunes."

"And you—you are interested?"

"Most assuredly. I have even given my mite. I am interested in"—she paused and shrugged her shoulders—"in you, since you ask me, in Dorothy, and in Mr. Roden. He gave the flowers at which you are so earnestly looking, by the way."

"Ah!" said Cornish, politely.

"Yes," answered Mrs. Vansittart, with a passing smile. "He is kind enough to give me flowers from time to time. You never gave me flowers, Mr. Cornish, in the olden times."

"Because I could not afford good ones."

"And you would not offer anything more reasonable?"

"Not to you," he answered.

"But of course that was long ago."

"Yes. I am glad to hear that you know Miss Roden. It will make the little villa on the Dunes less sad. The atmosphere of malgamite is not cheerful. One sees it at its best in a London drawing-room. It is one of the many realities which have an evil odour when approached too closely."

"And you are coming nearer to it?"

"It is coming nearer to me."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Vansittart, examining the rings with which her fingers were laden. "I thought there would be developments."

"There are developments. Hence my presence in the Hague. Lord Ferriby *et famille* arrive to-morrow. Also my friend Major White."

"The fighting man?" inquired Mrs. Vansittart.

"Yes, the fighting man. We are to have a solemn meeting. It has been found necessary to alter our financial basis——"

Mrs. Vansittart held up a warning hand. "Do not talk to me of your financial basis. I know nothing of money. It is not from that point of view that I contemplate your Malgamite scheme."

"Ah! Then, if one may inquire, from what point of view . . . . ?"

"From the human point of view; as does every other woman connected with it. We are advancing, I admit, but I think we shall always be willing to leave the—financial basis—to your down-trodden sex."

"It is very kind of you to be interested in these poor people," began Cornish; but Mrs. Vansittart interrupted him vivaciously.

"Poor people? Gott bewahre!" she cried. "Did you think I meant the workers? Oh no! I am not interested in them. I am interested in your Rodens and your Ferribys and your Whites, and even in your Tony Cornish. I wonder who will quarrel and who will—well, do the contrary, and what will come of it all? In my day young people were brought together by a common pleasure, but that has gone out of fashion. And now it is a common endeavour to achieve the impossible, to check the stars in their courses by the holding of mixed meetings, and the enunciation of second-hand platitudes respecting the poor and the masses—this is what brings the present generation into that intercourse which ends in love and marriage and death—the old programme. And it is from that point of view alone, *mon ami*, that I take a particle of interest in your Malgamite scheme."

All of which Tony Cornish remembered later; for it was untrue. He rose to take his leave with polite hopes of seeing her again.

"Oh, do not hurry away," she said. "I am ex-

pecting Dorothy Roden, who promised to come to tea. She will be disappointed not to see you."

Cornish laughed in his light way. "You are kind in your assumptions," he answered. "Miss Roden is barely aware of my existence, and would not know me from Adam."

Nevertheless he stayed, moving about the room for some minutes looking at the flowers and the pictures, of which he knew just as much as was desirable and fashionable. He knew what flowers were "in," such as fuchsias and tulips, and what were "out," such as camellias and double hyacinths. About the pictures he knew a little, and asked questions as to some upon the walls that belonged to the Dutch school. He was of the universe, universal. Then he sat down again unobtrusively, and Mrs. Vansittart did not seem to notice that he had done so, though she glanced at the clock.

A few minutes later Dorothy came in. She changed colour when Mrs. Vansittart half introduced Cornish with the conventional, "I think you know each other."

"I knew you were coming to the Hague," she said, shaking hands with Cornish. "I had a letter from Joan the other day. They are all coming, are they not? I am afraid Joan will be very much disappointed in me. She thinks I am wrapped up heart and soul in the malgamiters—and I am not, you know."

She turned with a little laugh, and appealed to

Mrs. Vansittart, who was watching her closely, as if Dorothy were displaying some quality or point hitherto unknown to the older woman. The girl's eyes were certainly brighter than usual.

"Joan takes some things very seriously," answered Cornish.

"We all do that," said Mrs. Vansittart, without looking up from the tea-table at which she was engaged.

"Yes; it is a mistake, of course."

"Possibly," assented Mrs. Vansittart. "Do you take sugar, Miss Roden?"

"Yes, please—seriously. Two pieces."

"Are you like Joan?" asked Cornish, as he gave her the cup. "Do you take anything else seriously?"

"Oh no," answered Dorothy Roden, with a laugh.

"And your brother?" inquired Mrs. Vansittart. "Is he coming this afternoon?"

"He will follow me. He is busy with the new malgamiters who arrived this morning. I suppose you brought them, Mr. Cornish?"

"Yes, I brought them. Twenty-four of them—the dregs, so to speak. The very last of the malgamiters, collected from all parts of the world. I was not proud of them."

He sat down and quickly changed the conversation, showing quite clearly that this subject interested him as little as it interested his companions. He brought the latest news from London, which the

ladies were glad enough to hear. For to Dorothy Roden, at least, the Hague was a place of exile where men lived different lives and women thought different thoughts. Are there not a hundred little rivulets of news which never flow through the journals, but are passed from mouth to mouth, and seem shallow enough, but which, uniting at last, form a great stream of public opinion, and this, having formed itself imperceptibly, is suddenly found in full flow, and is so obvious that the newspapers forget to mention it? Thus colonists and other exiles returning to England, and priding themselves upon having kept in touch with the progress of events and ideas in the old country, find that their thoughts have all the while been running in the wrong channels—that seemingly great events have been considered very small, that small ideas have been lifted high by the babbling crowd which is vaguely called society.

From Tony Cornish, Mrs. Vansittart and Dorothy learnt that among other social playthings charity was for the moment being laid aside. We have inherited, it appears, a great box of playthings, and the careful student of history will find that none of the toys are new—that they have indeed been played with by our forefathers, who did just as we do. They took each toy from the box, and cried aloud that it was new, that the world had never seen its like before. Had it not, indeed? Then presently the toy—be it charity or a new religion, or

sentiment, or greed of gain, or war—is thrown back into the box again, where it lies until we of a later day drag it forth with the same cry that it is new. We grow wild with excitement over South African mines, and never recognize the old South Sea bubble trimmed anew to suit the taste of the day. We crow with delight over our East End slums, and never recognize the patched-up remnants of the last Crusade that fizzled out so ignominiously at Acre five hundred years ago.

So Tony Cornish, who was *dans le mouvement*, gently intimated to his hearers that what may be called a robuster tone ruled the spirit of the age. Charity was going down, athletics were coming up. Another Olympiad had passed away. Wise indeed was Solon, who allowed four years for men to soften and to harden again. During the Olympiads it is to be presumed that men busied themselves with the slums that existed in those days, hearkened to the decadent poetry or fiction of that time, and then, as the robuster period of the games came round, braced themselves once more to the consideration of braver things.

It appeared, therefore, that the Malgamite scheme was already a thing of the past so far as social London was concerned. A sensational 'Varsity boat-race had given charity its *coup de grace*, had ushered in the Spring, when even the poor must shift for themselves.

"And in the meantime," commented Mrs.

Vansittart, "here are four hundred industrials landed, if one may so put it, at the Hague."

"Yes; but that will be all right," retorted Cornish, with his gay laugh. "They only wanted a start. They have got their start. What more can they desire? Is not Lord Ferriby himself coming across? He is at the moment on board the Flushing boat. And he is making a great sacrifice, for he must be aware that he does not look nearly so impressive on the Continent as he does, say in Piccadilly, where the policemen know him, and even the newspaper boys are dimly aware that this is no ordinary man to whom one may offer a halfpenny Radical paper——"

Cornish broke off, and looked towards the door, which was at this moment thrown open by a servant, who announced—

"Herr Roden. Herr von Holzen."

The two men came forward together, Roden slouching and heavy-shouldered, but well dressed; Von Holzen smaller, compacter, with a thoughtful, still face and calculating eyes. Roden introduced his companion to the two ladies. It is possible that a certain reluctance in his manner indicated the fact that he had brought Von Holzen against his own desire. Either Von Holzen had asked to be brought or Mrs. Vansittart had intimated to Roden that she would welcome his associate, but this was not touched upon in the course of the introduction. Cornish looked gravely on. Von Holzen was betrayed

into a momentary gaucheness, as if he were not quite at home in a drawing-room.

Roden drew forward a chair, and seated himself near to Mrs. Vansittart with an air of familiarity which the lady seemed rather to invite than to resent. They had, it appeared, many topics in common. Roden had come with the purpose of seeing Mrs. Vansittart, and no one else. Her manner, also, changed as soon as Roden entered the room, and seemed to appeal with a sort of deference to his judgment of all that she said or did. It was a subtle change, and perhaps no one noticed it, though Dorothy, who was exchanging conventional remarks with Von Holzen, glanced across the room once.

"Ah," Von Holzen was saying in his grave way, with his head bent a little forward, as if the rounded brow were heavy—"ah, but I am only the chemist, Miss Roden. It is your brother who has placed us on our wonderful financial basis. He has a head for finance, your brother, and is quick in his calculations. He understands money, whereas I am only a scientist."

He spoke English correctly but slowly, with the Dutch accent, which is slighter and less guttural than the German. Dorothy was interested in him, and continued to talk with him, leaving Cornish standing at a little distance, teacup in hand. Von Holzen was in strong contrast to the two Englishmen. He was graver, more thoughtful, a man of deeper purpose and more solid intellect. There was something

dimly Napoleonic in the direct and calculating glance of his eyes, as if he never looked idly at anything or any man. It was he who made a movement after the lapse of a few moments only, as if, having recovered his slight embarrassment, he did not intend to stay longer than the merest etiquette might demand. He crossed the room, and stood before Mrs. Vansittart, with his heels clapped well together, making the most formal conversation, which was only varied by a stiff bow.

"I have a friendly recollection," he said, preparing to take his leave, "of a Charles Vansittart, a student at Leyden, with whom I was brought into contact again in later life. He was, I believe, from Amsterdam, of an English mother."

"Ah!" replied Mrs. Vansittart. "Mine is a common name."

And they bowed to each other in the foreign way.

CHAPTER X.

DEEPER WATER.

"Une bonne intention est une échelle trop courte."

"I HAVE had considerable experience in such matters, and I think I may say that the new financial scheme worked out by Mr. Roden and myself is a sound one," Lord Ferriby was saying in his best manner.

He was addressing Major White, Tony Cornish, Von Holzen, and Percy Roden, convened to a meeting in the private *salon* occupied by the Ferribys at the Hotel of the Old Shooting Gallery, at the Hague.

The *salon* in question was at the front of the house on the first floor, and therefore looked out upon the Toornoifeld, where the trees were beginning to show a tender green, under the encouragement of a treacherous April sun. Major White, seated bolt upright in his chair, looked with a gentle surprise out of the window. He had so small an opinion of his understanding that he usually begged explanatory persons to excuse him. "No doubt you're quite right, but it's no use trying to explain it to *me*,

don't you know," he was in the habit of saying, and his attitude said no less at the present moment.

Von Holzen, with his chin in the palm of his hand, watched Lord Ferriby's face with a greater attention than that transparent physiognomy required. Roden's attention was fully occupied by the papers on the table in front of him. He was seated by Lord Ferriby's side, ready to prompt or assist, as behoved a merely mechanical subordinate. Lord Ferriby, dimly conscious of this mental attitude, had spoken Roden's name with considerable patronage, and with the evident desire to give every man his due. Cornish, in his quick and superficial way, glanced from one face to the other, taking in *en passant* any object in the room that happened to call for a momentary attention. He noted the passive and somewhat bovine surprise on White's face, and wondered whether it owed its presence there to astonishment at finding himself taking part in a committee meeting or amazement at the suggestion that Lord Ferriby should be capable of evolving any scheme, financial or otherwise, out of his own brain. The committee thus summoned was a fair sample of its kind. Here were a number of men dividing a sense of responsibility among them so impartially that there was not nearly enough of it to go round. In a multitude of councillors there may be safety, but it is assuredly the councillors only who are safe.

"The reasons," continued Lord Ferriby, "why

it is inexpedient to continue in our present position as mere trustees of a charitable fund are too numerous to go into at the present moment. Suffice it to say that there are many such reasons, and that I have satisfied myself of their soundness. Our chief desire is to ameliorate the condition of the malgamite workers. It must assuredly suggest itself to any one of us that the best method of doing this is to make the malgamite workers an independent corporation, bound together by the greatest of ties, a common interest."

The speaker paused, and turned to Roden with a triumphant smile, as much as to say, "There, beat that if you can."

Roden could not beat it, so he nodded thoughtfully, and examined the point of his pen.

"Gentlemen," said Lord Ferriby, impressively, "the greatest common interest is a common purse."

As the meeting was too small for applause, Lord Ferriby only allowed sufficient time for this great truth to be assimilated, and then continued—

"It is proposed, therefore, that we turn the Malgamite Works into a company, the most numerous shareholders to be the malgamiters themselves. The most numerous shareholders, mark you—not the heaviest shareholders. These shall be ourselves. We propose to estimate the capital of the company at ten thousand pounds, which, as you know, is, approximately speaking, the amount raised by our appeals on behalf of this great charity. We shall divide this

capital into two thousand five-pound shares, allot one share to each malgamite worker—say five hundred shares—and retain the rest—say fifteen hundred shares—ourselves. Of those fifteen hundred, it is proposed to allot three hundred to each of us. Do I make myself clear ? "

"Yes," answered Major White, optimistically polishing his eye-glass with a pocket-handkerchief. "Any ass could understand that."

"Our friend Mr. Roden," continued his lordship, "who, I mention in passing, is one of the finest financiers with whom I have ever had relationship, is of opinion that this company, having its works in Holland, should not be registered as a limited company in England. The reasons for holding such an opinion are, briefly, connected with the interference of the English law in the management of a limited liability company formed for the sole purpose of making money. We are not disposed to classify ourselves as such a company. We are not disposed to pay the English income tax on money which is intended for distribution in charity. Each malgamite worker, with his one share, is not, precisely speaking, so much a shareholder as a participator in profits. We are not in any sense a limited liability company."

That Lord Ferriby had again made himself clear was sufficiently indicated by the fact that Major White nodded his head at this juncture with portentous gravity and wisdom.

"As to the question of profit and loss," continued Lord Ferriby, "I am not, unfortunately, a business man myself, but I think we are all aware that the business part of the Malgamite scheme is in excellent hands. It is not, of course, intended that we, as shareholders, shall in any way profit by this new financial basis. We are shareholders in name only, and receive profits, if profits there be, merely as trustees of the Malgamite Fund. We shall administer those profits precisely as we have administered the fund—for the sole benefit of the malgamite workers. The profits of these poor men, earned on their own share, may reasonably be considered in the light of a bonus. So much for the basis upon which I propose that we shall work. The matter has had Mr. Roden's careful consideration, and I think we are ready to give our consent to any proposal which has received so marked a benefit. There are, of course, many details which will require discussion—— Eh?"

Lord Ferriby broke off short, and turned to Roden, who had muttered a few words.

"Ah—yes. Yes, certainly. Mr. Roden will kindly spare us details as much as possible."

This was considerate and somewhat appropriate, as Tony Cornish had yawned more than once.

"Now as to the past," continued Lord Ferriby. "The works have been going for more than three months, and the result has been uniformly satisfactory—— Eh?"

"Many deaths?" inquired White, stolidly repeating his question.

"Deaths? Ah—among the workers? Yes, to be sure. Perhaps Mr. von Holzen can tell you better than I."

And his lordship bowed in what he took to be the foreign manner across the table.

"Yes," replied Von Holzen, quietly, "there have, of course, been deaths, but not so many as I anticipated. The majority of the men had, as Mr. Cornish will tell you, death written on their faces when they arrived at the Hague."

"They certainly looked seedy," admitted Tony.

"We will, I think, turn rather to the—eh—er—living," said Lord Ferriby, turning over the papers in front of him with a slightly reproachful countenance. He evidently thought it rather bad form of White to pour cold water over his new whitewash. For Lord Ferriby's was that charity which hopeth all things, and closeth her eye to practical facts, if these be discouraging. "I have here the result of the three months' work."

He looked at the papers with so condescending an air that it was quite evident that, had he been a business man and not a lord, he would have understood them at a glance. There was a short silence while he turned over the closely written sheets with an air of approving interest.

"Yes," he said, as if during those moments he had run his eye up all the column of figures and

found them correct, "the result, as I say, gentlemen, has been most satisfactory. We have manufactured a malgamite which has been well received by the paper-makers. We have, furthermore, been able to supply at the current rate without any serious loss. We are increasing our plant, and the day is not so far distant when we may, at all events, hope to be self-supporting."

Lord Ferriby sat up and pulled down his waistcoat, a sure signal that the fountain of his garrulous inspiration was for the moment dried up.

With great presence of mind Tony Cornish interposed a question which only Roden could answer, and after the consideration of some statistics, the proceedings terminated. It had been apparent all through that Percy Roden was the only business man of the party. In any question of figures or statistics his colleagues showed plainly that they were at sea. Lord Ferriby had in early life been managed by a thrifty mother, who had in due course married him to a thrifty wife. Tony Cornish's business affairs had been narrowed down to the financial fiasco of a tailor's bill far beyond his facilities. Major White had, in his subaltern days, been despatched from Gibraltar on a business quest into the interior of Spain to buy mules there for his Queen and country. He fell out with a dealer at Ronda, whom he knocked down, and returned to Gibraltar branded as unbusiness-like and hasty, and there his commercial enterprise had terminated.

Von Holzen was only a scientist, a fact of which he assured his colleagues repeatedly.

If plain speaking be a sign of friendship, then women are assuredly capable of higher flights than men. A life-long friendship between two women usually means that they quarrelled at school, and have retained in later days the privilege of mutual plain speaking. If Jones, who was Tompkins's best man, goes yachting with Tompkins in later days, these two sinners are quite capable of enjoying themselves immensely in the present without raking about among the ashes of the past to seek the reason why Tompkins persisted, in spite of his friends' advice, in making an idiot of himself over that Robinson girl—Jones standing by all the while with the ring in his waistcoat pocket. Whereas, if the friendship existed between the respective ladies of Jones and Tompkins, their conversation will usually be found to begin with: "I always told you, Maria, when we were girls together," or, "Well, Jane, when we were at school you never would listen to me." A man's friendship is apparently based upon a knowledge of another's redeeming qualities. A woman's dearest friend is she whose faults will bear the closest investigation.

It was doubtless owing to these trifling variations in temperament that Joan Ferriby learnt more about the Hague and Percy Roden and Otto von Holzen, and lastly, though not leastly, Mrs. Van-

sittart, in ten minutes than Tony Cornish could have learnt in a month of patient investigation. The first five of these ten precious minutes were spent in kissing Dorothy Roden, and admiring her hat, and holding her at arm's length, and saying, with conviction, that she was a dear. Then Joan asked why Dorothy had ceased writing, and Dorothy proved that it was Joan who had been in default, and lo! a bridge was thrown across the years, and they were friends once more.

"And you mean to tell me," said Joan, as they walked up the Korte Voorhout towards the canal and the Wood, "that you don't take any interest in the Malgamite scheme?"

"No," answered Dorothy. "And I am weary of the very word."

"But then you always were rather—well, frivolous, weren't you?"

"I did not take lessons as seriously as you, perhaps, if that is what you mean," admitted Dorothy.

And Joan, who had come across to Holland full of zeal in well-doing, and as seriously as ever Queen Marguerite sailed to the Holy Land, walked on in silence. The trees were just breaking into leaf, and the air was laden with a subtle odour of spring. The Korte Voorhout is, as many know, a short broad street, spotlessly clean, bordered on either side by quaint and comfortable houses. The traffic is usually limited to one carriage going to the Wood, and on the pavement a few leisurely per-

sons engaged in taking exercise in the sunshine. It was a different atmosphere to that from which Joan had come, more restful, purer perhaps, and certainly healthier, possibly more thoughtful; and charity, above all virtues, to be practised well must be practised without too much reflection. He who lets wisdom guide his bounty too closely will end by giving nothing at all.

"At all events," said Joan, "it is splendid of Mr. Roden to work so hard in the cause, and to give himself up to it as he does."

"Ye—es."

Joan turned sharply and looked at her companion. Dorothy Roden's face was not, perhaps, easy to read, especially when she turned, as she turned now, to meet an inquiring glance with an easy smile.

"I have known so many of Percy's schemes," she explained, "that you must not expect me to be enthusiastic about this."

"But this must succeed, whatever may have happened to the others," cried Joan. "It is such a good cause. Surely nothing can be a better aim than to help such afflicted people, who cannot help themselves, Dorothy! And it is so splendidly organized. Why, Mr. Johnson, the labour expert, you know, who wears no collar and a soft hat, said that it could not have been better organized if it had been a strike. And a Bishop Somebody—a dear old man with legs like a billiard-table—said

it reminded him of the early Christians' *esprit de corps*, or something like that. Doesn't sound like a bishop, though, does it ? "

"No, it doesn't," admitted Dorothy, doubtfully.

"So if your brother thinks it will not succeed," said Joan, confidently, "he is wrong. Besides"—in a final voice—"he has Tony to help him, you know."

"Yes," said Dorothy, looking straight in front of her, "of course he has Mr. Cornish."

"And Tony," pursued Joan, eagerly, "always succeeds. There is something about him—I don't know what it is."

Dorothy recollected that Mrs. Vansittart had said something like this about Tony Cornish. She had said that he had the power of holding his cards and only playing them at the right moment. Which is perhaps the secret of success in life, namely, to hold one's cards, and, if the right moment does not present itself, never to play them at all, but to hold them to the end of the game, contenting one's self with the knowledge that one has had, after all, the makings of a fine game that might have been worth the playing.

"There are people, you know," Joan broke in earnestly, "who think that if they can secure Tony for a picnic the weather will be fine."

"And does he know it ? " asked Dorothy, rather shortly.

"Tony ! " laughed Joan. "Of course not. He never thinks about anything like that."

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE OUDE WEG.

"Le sage entend à demi mot."

THE porter of the hotel on the Toornoifeld was enjoying his early cigarette in the doorway, when he was impelled by a natural politeness to stand aside for one of the visitors in the hotel.

"Ah!" he said. "You promenade yourself thus early?"

"Yes," answered Cornish, cheerily, "I promenade myself thus early."

"You have had your coffee?" asked the porter. "It is not good to go near the canals when one is empty."

Cornish lingered a few minutes, and made the man's mind easy on this point. There are many who obtain a vast deal of information without ever asking a question, just as there are some—and they are mostly women—who ask many questions and are told many lies. Tony Cornish had a cheery way with him which made other men talk. He was also as quick as a woman. He went about the world picking up information.

The city clocks were striking seven as he walked across the Toornoifeld, where the morning mist still lingered among the trees. The great square was almost deserted. Holland, unlike France, is a lie-abed country, and at an hour when a French town would be astir and its streets already thronged with people hurrying to buy or sell at the greatest possible advantage, a Dutch city is still asleep. Park Straat was almost deserted as Cornish walked briskly down it towards the Willem Park and Scheveningen. A few street cleaners were leisurely working, a few milkmen were hurrying from door to door, but the houses were barred and silent.

Cornish walked on the right-hand side of the road, which made it all the easier for Mrs. Vansittart to perceive him from her bedroom window as he passed Oranje Straat.

"Ah!" said that lady, and rang the bell for her maid, to whom she explained that she had a sudden desire to take a promenade this fine morning.

So Tony Cornish walked down the Oude Weg under the trees of that great thoroughfare, with Mrs. Vansittart following him leisurely by one of the side paths, which, being elevated above the road, enabled her to look down upon the Englishman and keep him in sight. When he came within view of the broad road that cuts the Scheveningen wood in two and leads from the East Dunes to the West —from the Malgamite Works, in a word, to the

cemetery—he sat down on a bench hidden by the trees. And Mrs. Vansittart, a hundred yards behind him, took possession of a seat as effectually concealed.

They remained thus for some time, the object of a passing curiosity to the fish-merchants journeying from Scheveningen to the Hague. Then Tony Cornish seemed to perceive something on the road towards the sea which interested him, and Mrs. Vansittart, rising from her seat, walked down to the main pathway, which commanded an uninterrupted view. That which had attracted Cornish's attention was a funeral, cheap, sordid, and obscure, which moved slowly across the Oude Weg by the road, crossing it at right angles. It was a peculiar funeral, inasmuch as it consisted of three hearses and one mourning carriage. The dead were, therefore, almost as numerous as the living, an unusual feature in civil burials. From the window of the rusty mourning coach there looked a couple of debased countenances, flushed with drink and that special form of excitement which is especially associated with a mourning coach hired on credit and a funeral beyond one's means. Behind these two faces loomed others. There seemed to be six men within the carriage.

The procession was not inspiriting, and Cornish's face was momentarily grave as he watched it. When it had passed, he rose and walked slowly back towards the Hague. Before he had gone far,

he met Mrs. Vansittart face to face, who rose from a seat as he approached.

"Well, *mon ami*," she asked, with a short laugh, "have you had a pleasant walk?"

"It has had a pleasant end, at all events," he replied, meeting her glance with an imperturbable smile.

She jerked her head upwards with a little foreign gesture of indifference.

"It is to be presumed," she said, as they walked on side by side, "that you have been exploring and investigating our—byways. Remember, my good Tony, that I live in the Hague, and may therefore be possessed of information that might be useful to you. It will probably be at your disposal when you need it."

She looked at him with daring black eyes, and laughed. A strong man usually takes a sort of pride in his power. This woman enjoyed the same sort of exultation in her own cleverness. She was not wise enough to hide it, which is indeed a grim, negative pleasure usually enjoyed by elderly gentlemen only. Social progress has, moreover, made it almost a crime to hide one's light under a bushel. Are we not told, in so many words, by the interviewer and the personal paragraphist, that it is every man's duty to set his light upon a candlestick, so that his neighbour may at least try to blow it out?

Cornish had learnt to know Mrs. Vansittart at a period in her life when, as a young married woman,

she regarded all her juniors with a matronly goodwill, none the less active that it was so exceedingly new. She had in those days given much good advice, which Cornish had respectfully heard. Fate had brought them together at the rare moment and in almost the sole circumstances that allow of a friendship being formed between a man and a woman.

They walked slowly side by side now under the trees of the Oude Weg, inhaling the fresh morning air, which was scented by a hundred breaths of spring, and felt clean to face and lips. Mrs. Vansittart had no intention of resigning her position of mentor and friend. It was, moreover, one of those positions which will not bear being defined in so many words. Between men and women it often happens that to point out the existence of certain feelings is to destroy them. To say, "Be my friend," as often as not makes friendship impossible. Mrs. Vansittart was too clever a woman to run such a risk in dealing with a man in whom she had detected a reserve of which the rest of the world had taken no account. It is unwise to enter into war or friendship without seeing to the reserves.

"Do you remember," asked Mrs. Vansittart, suddenly, "how wise we were when we were young? What knowledge of the world, what experience of life one has when all life is before one!"

"Yes," admitted Cornish, guardedly.

"But if I preached a great deal, I at all events did you no harm," said Mrs. Vansittart, with a laugh.

"No."

"And as to experience, well, one buys that later."

"Yes; and the wise re-sell—at a profit," laughed Cornish. "It is not a commodity that any one cares to keep. If we cannot sell it, we offer it for nothing, to the young."

"Who accept it, at an even lower valuation; and you and I, Mr. Tony Cornish, are cynics who talk cheap epigrams to hide our thoughts."

They walked on for a few yards in silence. Then Tony turned in his quick way and looked at her. He had thin, mobile lips, which expressed friendship and curiosity at this moment.

"What are *you* thinking?" he asked.

She turned and looked at him with grave, searching eyes, and when these met his it became apparent that their friendship had re-established itself.

"Of your affairs," she answered, "and funerals."

"Both lugubrious," suggested Cornish. "But I am obliged to you for so far honouring me."

He broke off, and again walked on in silence. She glanced at him half angrily, and gave a quick shrug of the shoulders.

"Then you will not speak," she said, opening her parasol with a snap. "So be it. The time has perhaps not come yet. But if I am in the humour when the time does come, you will find that you

have no ally so strong as I. Ah, you may stick your chin out and look as innocent as you like! You are not easy in your mind, my good friend, about this precious Malgamite scheme. But I ask no confidences, and *bon Dieu!* I give none."

She broke off with a little laugh, and looked at him beneath the shade of her parasol. She had a hundred foreign ways of putting a whole wealth of meaning into a single gesture, into a movement of a parasol or a fan, such as women acquire, and use upon poor defenceless men, who must needs face the world with stolid faces and slow, dumb hands.

Cornish answered the laugh readily enough. "'Ah!" he said, "then I am accused of uneasiness of mind—of preoccupation, in fact. I plead guilty. I made a mistake. I got up too early. It was a fine morning, and I was tempted to take a walk before breakfast, which we have at half-past nine, in a fine old British way. We have toast and a fried sole. Great is the English milord!"

They were in Park Straat now, in sight of Mrs. Vansittart's house. And that lady knew that her companion was talking in order to say nothing.

"We leave this morning," continued Cornish, in the same vein. "And we rather flatter ourselves that we have upheld the dignity of our nation in these benighted foreign parts."

"Ah, that poor Lord Ferriby! It is so easy to laugh at him. You think him a fool, although—or because—he is your uncle. So do I, perhaps. But

I always have a little distrust for the foolishness of a person who has once been a knave. You know your uncle's reputation—the past one, I mean, not the whitewash. Do not forget it." They had reached the corner of Oranje Straat, and Mrs. Vansittart paused on her own doorstep. "So you leave this morning," she said. "Remember that I am in the Hague, and—well, we were once friends. If I can help you, make use of me. You have been wonderfully discreet, my friend. And I have not. But discretion is not required of a woman. If there is anything to tell you, you shall hear from me."

She held out her hand, and bade him good-bye with a semi-malicious laugh. Then she stood in the porch, and watched him walk quickly away.

"So it is Dorothy Roden," she said to herself, with a wise nod. "A queer case. One of those at first sight, one may suppose."

The Rodens, of whom she thought at the moment, were not only thinking, but speaking of her. They had finished breakfast, and Dorothy was standing at the window looking out over the Dunes towards the sea. Her brother was still seated at the table, and had lighted a cigarette. Like many another who offers an exaggerated respect to women as a whole, he was rather inclined to Bohemianism at home, and denied to his immediate feminine relations the privileges accorded to their sex in general. He was older than Dorothy, who had always been dependent upon him to a certain extent. She had a

little money of her own, and quite recognized the fact that, should her brother marry, she would have to work for her living. In the meantime, however, it suited them both to live together, and Dorothy had for her brother that affection of which only women are capable. It amounts to an affectionate tolerance more than to a tolerant affection. For it perceives its object's little failings with a calm and judicial eye. It weighs the man in the balance, and finds him wanting. This, moreover, is the lot of a large proportion of women. This takes the place of that higher feeling which is probably the finest emotion of which the human heart is capable. And yet there are men who grudge these sufferers their petty triumphs, their poor little emancipation, their paltry wranglerships, their very bicycles.

"You don't like this place—I know that," Percy Roden was saying, in continuation of a desultory conversation. He looked up from the letters before him with a smile which was kind enough and a little patronizing. Patronage is perhaps the armour of the outwitted.

"Not very much," answered Dorothy, with a laugh. "But I dare say it will be better in the summer."

"I mean this villa," pursued Roden, flicking the ash from his cigarette and leaning back in his chair. He had grand, rather tired gestures, which possibly impressed some people. Grandeur, however, like sentiment, is not indigenous to the

hearth. Our domestic admirers are not always watching us.

Dorothy was looking out of the window. "It is not a bad little place," she said practically, "when one has grown accustomed to its sandiness."

"It will not be for long," said Percy Roden.

And his sister turned and looked at him with a sudden gravity.

"Ah!" she said.

"No; I have been thinking that it will be better for us to move into the Hague—Park Straat or Oranje Straat."

Dorothy turned and faced him now. There was a faint, far-off resemblance between these two, but Dorothy had the better face—shrewder, more thoughtful, cleverer. Her eyes, instead of being large and dark and rather dreamy, were grey and speculative. Her features were clear-cut and well-cut—a face suggestive of feeling and of self-suppression, which, when they go together, got to the making of a satisfactory human being. This was a woman who, to put it quite plainly, would scarcely have been held in honour by our grandmothers, but who promised well enough for her possible granddaughters; who, when the fads are lived down and the emancipation is over and the shrieking is done, will make a very excellent grandmother to a race of women who shall be equal to men and respected of men, and, best of all, beloved of men. Wise mothers say that their daughters must sooner or later pass through an

awkward age. Woman is passing through an awkward age now, and Dorothy Roden might be classed among those who are doing it gracefully.

She looked at her brother with those wise grey eyes, and did not speak at once.

"Oranje Straat and Park Straat," she said lightly, "cost money."

"Oh, that is all right!" answered her brother, carelessly, as one who in his time has handled great sums.

"Then we are prosperous?" inquired Dorothy, mindful of other great schemes which had not always done their duty by their originator.

"Oh yes! We shall make a good thing out of this Malgamite. The labourer is worthy of his hire, you know. There is no reason why we should not take a better house than this. Mrs. Vansittart knows of one in Park Straat which would suit us. Do you like her—Mrs. Vansittart, I mean?"

His tone was slightly patronizing again. The Malgamite was a success, it appeared, and assuredly success is the most difficult emergency that a man has to face in life.

"Very much," answered Dorothy quietly. She looked hard at her brother; for Dorothy had long ago gauged him, and had recently gauged Mrs. Vansittart with a facility which is quite incomprehensible to men and easy enough to women. She knew that her brother was not the sort of man to arouse the faintest spark of love in the heart of such

a woman as her of whom they spoke. And yet Percy's tone implied as clearly as if the words had been spoken that he had merely to offer to Mrs. Vansittart his hand and heart in order to make her the happiest of women. Either Dorothy or her brother was mistaken in Mrs. Vansittart. Between a man and a woman it is usually the man who is mistaken in an estimate of another woman. Dorothy was wondering, not whether Mrs. Vansittart admired her brother, but why that lady was taking the trouble to convey to him that such was the case.

CHAPTER XII.

SUBURBAN.

"Le bonheur c'est être né joyeux."

THERE are in the suburbs of London certain strata of men which lie in circles of diminishing density around the great city, like *débris* around a volcano. London indeed erupts every evening between the hours of five and six, and throws out showers of tired men, who lie where they fall—or rather where their season ticket drops them—until morning, when they arise and crowd back again to the seething crater. The deposits of small clerks and tradespeople fall near at hand, in a dense shower, bounded on the north by Finchley, on the south by Streatham. An outer circle of head clerks, Government servants, junior partners, covers the land in a stratum reaching as far south as Surbiton, as far north as the Alexandra Palace. And beyond these limits are cast the brighter lights of commerce, law, and finance, who fall, a thin golden shower, in the favoured neighbourhoods of the far suburbs, where, from eventide till morning, they play at being country gentlemen,

talking stock and stable, with minds attuned to share and produce.

Mr. Joseph Wade, banker, was one of those who are thrown far afield by the facilities of a fine suburban train service. He wore a frock-coat, a very shiny hat, and he read the *Times* in the train. He lived in a staring red house, solid brick without and solid comfort within, in the favoured pine country of Weybridge. He was one of those pillars of the British Constitution who are laughed at behind their backs and eminently respected to their faces. His gardeners trembled before him, his coachman, as stout and respectable as himself, knew him to be a just and a good master, who grudged no man his perquisites, and behaved with a fine gentlemanly tact at those trying moments when the departing visitor is desirous of tipping and the coachman knows that it is blessed to receive.

Mr. Wade rather scorned the amateur country-gentleman hobby which so many of his travelling companions affected. It led them to don rough tweed suits on Sunday, and walk about their paddocks and gardens as if these formed a great estate.

"I am a banker," he said, with that sound common-sense which led him to avoid those cheap affectations of superiority that belong to the outer strata of the daily volcanic deposit—"I am a banker, and I am content to be a banker in the evening and on Sundays, as well as during bank-hours. What

should I know about horses or Alderneys or Dorking fowls? None of 'em yield a dividend."

Mr. Wade, in fact, looked upon "The Brambles" as a place of rest, arriving there at half-past six, in time to dress for a very good dinner. After dinner he read in a small way by no means to be despised. He had a taste for biography, and cherished in his stout heart a fine old respect for Thackeray and Dickens and Walter Scott. Of the modern fictionists he knew nothing.

"Seems to me they are splitting straws, my dear," he once said to an earnest young person who thought that literature meant contemporary fiction, whereas we all know that the two are in no way connected.

Joseph Wade was a widower, having some years before buried a wife as stout and sensible as himself. He never spoke of her except to his daughter Marguerite, now leaving school, and usually confined his remarks to a consideration of what Marguerite's mother would have liked in the circumstances under discussion at the moment.

Marguerite had been educated at Cheltenham, and "finished" at Dresden, without any limit as to extras. She had come home from Dresden a few months before the Malgamite scheme was set on foot, to find herself regarded by her father in the light of a rather delicate financial crisis. The affection which had always existed between father and daughter soon developed into something stronger something volatile

and half mocking on her part, indulgent and half mystified on his.

"She is rather a handful," wrote Mr. Wade to Tony Cornish, "and too inconsequent to let my mind be easy about her future. I wish you would run down and dine and sleep at 'The Brambles' some evening soon. Monday is Marguerite's eighteenth birthday. Will you come on that evening?"

"He is not thirty-three yet," reflected Mr. Wade, as he folded the letter and slipped it into an envelope, "and she is the sort of girl who must be able to give a man her full respect before she can give him—er—anything else."

From which it may be perceived that the astute banker was preparing to face the delicate financial crisis.

Cornish received the invitation the day after returning from Holland. Mr. Wade had been his father's friend and trustee, and was, he understood, distantly related to the mother whom Tony had never known. Such invitations were not infrequent, and it was the recipient's custom to set aside others in order to reply with an acceptance A friendship had sprung up between two men who were not only divided by a gulf of years, but had hardly a thought in common.

On arriving at Weybridge station, Cornish found Marguerite awaiting his arrival in a very high dog-cart drawn by an exceedingly shiny cob, which animal she proceeded to handle with vast spirit and

a blithe ignorance. She looked trim and fresh, with bright brown hair under a smart sailor hat, and a complexion almost dazzling in its youthfulness and brilliancy. She nodded gaily at Cornish.

"Hop up," she said encouragingly, "and then hang on like grim death. There are going to be—whoa, my pet!—er—ructions. All right, William. Let go."

William let go, and made a dash at the rear step. The shiny cob squeaked, stood thoughtfully on his hind legs for a moment, and then dashed across the bridge, shaving a cab rather closely, and failing to observe a bank of stones at one side of the road.

"Do you mind this sort of thing?" inquired Marguerite, as they bumped heavily over the obstruction.

"Not in the least. Most invigorating, I consider it."

Marguerite arranged the reins carefully, and inclined the whip at a suitable angle across her companion's vision.

"I'm learning to drive, you know," she said, leaning confidently down from her high seat. "And papa thinks that because this young gentleman is rather stout he is quiet, which is quite a mistake. Whoa! Steady! Keep off the grass! Visitors are requested to keep to—— Well, I'm"—she hauled the pony off the common, whither he had betaken himself, on to the road again—"blowed," she added, religiously completing her unfinished sentence.

They were now between high fences, and compelled to progress more steadily.

"I am very glad you have come, you know," Marguerite took the opportunity of assuring the visitor. "It is jolly slow, I can tell you, at times; and then you will do papa good. He is very difficult to manage. It took me a week to get this pony out of him. His great idea is for somebody to marry me. He looks upon me as a sort of fund that has to be placed or sunk or something, somewhere. There was a young Scotchman here the week before last. I have forgotten his name already. John—something—Fairly. Yes, that is it—John Fairly, of Auchen-something. It is better to be John Fairly, of Auchen-something, than a belted earl, it appears."

"Did John tell you so himself?" inquired Tony.

"Yes; and he ought to know, oughtn't he? But that was what put me on my guard. When a Scotchman begins to tell you who he is, take my advice and sheer off."

"I will," said Tony.

"And when a Scotchman begins to tell you what he has, you may be sure that he wants something more. I smelt a rat at once. And I would not speak to him for the rest of the evening, or if I did, I spoke with a Scotch accent—just a suspeecion of an accent, you know—nothing to get hold of, but just enough to let him know that his Auchen-something would not go down with me."

She spoke with a sort of inconsequent earnestness, a relic of the school-days she had so lately left behind. She did not seem to have had time to decide yet whether life was a rattling farce or a matter of deadly earnest. And who shall blame her, remembering that older heads than hers are no clearer on that point?

On approaching the red villa by its short entrance drive of yellow gravel, they perceived Mr. Wade slowly walking in his garden. The garden of "The Brambles" was exactly the sort of garden one would expect to find attached to a house of that name. It was chiefly conspicuous for its lack of brambles, or indeed of any vegetable of such disorderly habit. Yellow gravel walks intersected smooth lawns. April having drawn almost to its close, there were thin red lines of tulips standing at attention all along the flowery borders. Not a stalk was out of place. One suspected that the flowers had been drilled by a martinet of a gardener. The sight of an honest weed would have been a relief to the eye. The curse of too much gardener and too little nature lay over the land.

"Ah!" said Mr. Wade, holding out a large white hand. "You perceive me inspecting the garden, and if you glance in the direction of McPherson's cottage you will perceive McPherson watching me. I pay him a hundred and twenty, and he knows that it is too much."

"By the way, papa," put in Marguerite, gravely,

"will you tell McPherson that he will receive a month's notice if he counts the peaches this summer, as he did last year?"

Mr. Wade laughed, and promised her a freer hand in this matter. They walked in the trim garden until it was time to dress for dinner, and Cornish saw enough to convince him that Mr. Wade was fully occupied between banking hours in his capacity as Marguerite's father.

That young lady came down as the bell rang, in a white dress as fresh and girlish as herself, and during the meal, which was long and somewhat solemn, entertained the guest with considerable liveliness. It was only after she had left them to their wine, over which the banker loved to linger in the old-fashioned way, that Mr. Wade put on his grave, financial air. He fingered his glass thoughtfully, as if choosing, not a subject of conversation, but a suitable way of approaching a premeditated question.

"You do not recollect your mother?" he said suddenly.

"No; she died when I was two years old."

Mr. Wade nodded, and slowly sipped his port. "Queer thing is," he said, after a pause and looking towards the door, "that that child is startlingly like what your mother used to be at the age of eighteen, when I first knew her. Perhaps it is only my imagination—not that I have much of that. Perhaps all girls are alike at that age—

a sort of freshness and an optimism that positively take one's breath away. At any rate, she reminds me of your mother." He broke off, and looked at Cornish with his slow and rather ponderous smile. His attitude towards the world was indeed one of conscious ponderosity. He did not attempt to understand the lighter side of life, but took it seriously as a work-a-day matter. "I was once in love with your mother," he stated squarely. "But circumstances were against us. You see, your father was a lord's younger brother, and that made a great difference in Clapham in those days. I felt it a good deal at the time, but I of course got over it years and years ago. No sentiment about me, Tony. Sentiment and seventeen stone won't balance, you know." The great man slowly drew the decanter towards him. "She got a better husband in your father—a clever, bright chap—and I was best man, I recollect. It was about that time—about your age I was—that I took seriously to my work. Before, I had been a little wild. And that interest has lasted me right up to the present time. Take my word for it, Tony, the greatest interest in life would be money-making—if one only knew what to do with the money afterwards." The banker had been eating a biscuit, and he now swept the crumbs together with his little finger from all sides in a lessening circle until they formed a heap upon the white tablecloth. "It accumulates," he said slowly, "accumulates,

accumulates. And, after all, one can only eat and drink the best that are to be obtained, and the best costs so little—a mere drop in the ocean." He handed Tony the decanter as he spoke. "Then I married Marguerite's mother, some years afterwards, when I was a middle-aged man. She was the only daughter of—the bank, you know."

And that seemed to be all that there was to be said about Marguerite's mother.

Tony Cornish nodded in his quick, sympathetic way. Mr. Wade had told him none of this before, but it was to be presumed that he had heard at least part of it from other sources. His manner now indicated that he was interested, but he did not ask his companion to say one word more than he felt disposed to utter. It is probable that he knew these to be no idle after-dinner words, spoken without premeditation, out of a full heart; for Mr. Wade was not, as he had boasted, a person of sentiment, but a plain, straightforward business man, who, if he had no meaning to convey, said nothing. And in this respect it is a pity that more are not like him.

"We have always been pretty good friends, you and I," continued the banker, "though I know I am not exactly your sort. I am distinctly City; you are as distinctly West End. But during your minority, and when we settled up accounts on your coming of age, and since then, we have always hit it off pretty well."

"Yes," said Cornish, moving his feet impatiently under the table.

There was no mistaking the aim of all this, and Mr. Wade was too British in his habits to beat about the bush much longer.

"I do not mind telling you that I have got you down in my will," said the banker.

Cornish bit his lip and frowned at his wine-glass. And it is possible that the man of no sentiment understood his silence.

"I have frequently disbelieved what I have heard of you," went on the elder man. "You have, doubtless, enemies—as all men have—and you have been a trifle reckless, perhaps, of what the world might say. If you will allow me to say so, I think none the worse of you for that."

Mr. Wade pushed the decanter across the table, and when Cornish had filled his glass, drew it back towards himself. It is wonderful what resource there is in half a glass of wine, if merely to examine it when it is hard to look elsewhere.

"You remember, six months ago, I spoke to you of a personal matter," said the banker. "I asked you if you had thoughts of marrying, and suggested something in the nature of a partnership if that would facilitate your plans in any way."

"That is not the sort of offer one is likely to forget," answered Cornish.

"I asked you if—well, if it was Joan Ferriby."

"Yes. And I answered that it was not Joan

Ferribly. That was mere gossip, of which we are both aware, and for which neither of us cares a pin."

"Then it comes to this," said Mr. Wade, drawing lines on the tablecloth with his dessert knife as if it were a balance-sheet, and he was casting the final totals there. "You are a man of the world; you are clever; you are like your father before you, in that you have something that women care about. Heaven only knows what it is, for I don't!" He paused, and looked at his companion as if seeking that intangible something. Then he jerked his head towards the drawing-room, where Marguerite could be dimly heard playing an air from the latest comic opera with a fine contempt for accidentals. "That child," he said, "knows no more about life than a sparrow. A man like myself—seventeen stone—may have to balance his books at any moment. You have a clear field; for you may take my word for it that you will be the first in it. My own experience of life has been mostly financial, but I am pretty certain that the first man a woman cares for is the man she cares for all along, though she may never see him again. I don't hold it out as an inducement, but there is no reason why you should not know that she will have a hundred and fifty thousand pounds—not when I am dead, but on the day she marries." Mr. Wade paused, and took a sip of his most excellent port. "Do not hurry,"

he said. "Take your time. Think about it carefully—unless you have already thought about it, and you can say yes or no now."

"I can do that."

Mr. Wade bent forward heavily, with one arm on the table.

"Ah!" he said. "Which is it?"

"It is no," answered Cornish, simply.

The banker passed his table-napkin across his lips, paused for a moment, and then rose with, as was his hospitable custom, his hand upon the sherry decanter.

"Then let us go into the drawing-room," he said.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MAKING OF A MAN.

"Heureux celui qui n'est forcé de sacrifier personne à son devoir."

"You know," said Marguerite the next morning, as she and Cornish rode quietly along the sandy roads, beneath the shade of the pines—"you know, papa is such a jolly, simple old dear—he doesn't understand women in the least."

"And do you call yourself a woman nowadays?" inquired Cornish.

"You bet. Bet those grey hairs of yours if you like. I see them! All down one side."

"They are all down both sides and on the top as well—my good—woman. How does your father fail to understand you?"

"Well, to begin with, he thinks it necessary to have Miss Williams, to housekeep and chaperon, and to do oddments generally—as if I couldn't run the show myself. You haven't seen Miss Williams—oh, crickey! She has gone to Cheltenham for a holiday, for which you may thank your eternal stars. She is just the sort of person who *would* go to Cheltenham. Then papa is desperately

keen about my marrying. He keeps trotting likely *partis* down here to dine and sleep—that's why you are here, I haven't a shadow of a doubt. None of the *partis* have passed muster yet. Poor old thing, he thinks I do not see through his little schemes."

Cornish laughed, and glanced at Marguerite under the shade of his straw hat, wondering, as men have probably wondered since the ages began, how it is that women seem to begin life with as great a knowledge of the world as we manage to acquire towards the end of our experience. Marguerite made her statements with a certain careless *aplomb*, and these were usually within measurable distance of the fact, whereas a youth her age and ten years older, if he be of a didactic turn, will hold forth upon life and human nature with an ignorance of both which is positively appalling.

"Now, I don't want to marry," said Marguerite, suddenly returning to her younger and more earnest manner. "What is the good of marrying?"

"What, indeed," echoed Cornish.

"Well, then, if papa tackles you—about me, I mean—when he has done the *Times*—he won't say anything before, the *Times* being the first object in papa's existence, and yours very truly the second—just you choke him off—won't you?"

"I will."

"Promise?"

"Promise faithfully."

"That's all right. Now tell me—is my hat on one side?"

Cornish assured her that her hat was straight, and then they talked of other things, until they came to a ditch suitable for some jumping lessons, which he had promised to give her.

She was bewilderingly changeable, at one moment childlike, and in the next very wise—now a heedless girl, and a moment later a keen woman of the world—appearing to know more of that abode of evil than she well could. Her colour came and went—her very eyes seemed to change. Cornish thought of this open field which Marguerite's father had offered, and perhaps he thought of the hundred and fifty thousand pounds that lay beneath so bright a surface.

On returning to "The Brambles," they found Mr. Wade reading the *Times* in the glass-covered veranda of that eligible suburban mansion. It being a Saturday, the great banker was taking a holiday, and Cornish had arranged not to return to town until midday.

"Come here," shouted Mr. Wade, "and have a cigar while you read the paper."

"And remember," added Marguerite, slim and girlish in her riding-habit; "choke him off!"

She stood on the door-step, looking over her shoulder, and nodded at Cornish, her fresh lips tilted at the corner by a smile full of gaiety and mysticism.

"Read that," said Mr. Wade, gravely.

But Mr. Wade was always grave—was clad in gravity and a frock-coat all his waking moments—and Cornish took up the newspaper carelessly. He stretched out his legs and lighted a cigar. Then he leisurely turned to the column indicated by his companion. It was headed, "Crisis in the Paper Trade: the Malgamite Corner."

And Tony Cornish did not raise his eyes from the printed sheet for a full ten minutes. When at length he looked up, he found Mr. Wade watching him, placid and patient.

"Can't make head or tail of it," he said, with a laugh.

"I will make both head and tail of it for you," said Mr. Wade, who in his own world had a certain reputation for plain speaking.

It was even said that this stout banker could tell a man to his face that he was a scoundrel with a cooler nerve than any in Lombard Street.

"What has occurred," he said, slowly folding the advertisement sheet of the *Times*, "is only what has been foreseen for a long time. The world has been degenerating into a maudlin state of sentiment for some years. The East End began it; a thousand sentimental charities have fostered the movement. Now, I am a plain man—a City man, Tony, to the tips of my toes." And he stuck out a large square-toed foot and looked contemplatively at it. "Half of your precious charities—the societies that you

and Joan Ferriby, and, if you will allow me to says so, that ass Ferriby, are mixed up in—are not fraudulent, but they are pretty near it. Some people who have no right to it are putting other people's money into their pockets. It is the money of fools —a fool and his money are soon parted, you know —but that does not make matters any better. The fools do not always part with their money for the right reason; but that also is of small importance. It is not our business if some of them do it because they like to see their names printed under the names of the royal and the great—if others do it for the mere satisfaction of being life-governors of this and that institution—if others, again, head the county lists because they represent a part of that county in Parliament—if the large majority give of their surplus to charities because they are dimly aware that they are no better than they should be, and wish to take shares in a concern that will pay a dividend in the hereafter. They know that they cannot take their money out of this world with them, so they think they had better invest some of it in what they vaguely understand to be a great limited company, with the bishops on the board and—I say it with all reverence—the Almighty in the chair. I would not say this to the first-comer because it would not be well received, and it is not fashionable to treat Charity from a common-sense point of view. It is fashionable to send a cheque to this and that

charity—feeling that it is charity, and therefore will be all right, and that the cheque will be duly placed on the credit side of the drawer's account in the heavenly books, however it may be foolishly spent or fraudulently appropriated by the payee on earth. Half a dozen of the fashionable charities are rotten, but we have not had a thorough-going swindle up to this time. We have been waiting for it . . . in Lombard Street. It is there. . . ."

He paused, and tapped the printed column of the *Times* with a fat and inexorable forefinger. He was, it must be remembered, a mere banker—a person in the City, where honesty is esteemed above the finer qualities of charity and beneficence, where soul and sentiment are so little known that he who of his charity giveth away another's money is held accountable for his manner of spending it.

"It is there . . . and you have the honour of being mixed up in it," said Mr. Wade.

Cornish took up the paper, and looked at the printed words with a vague surprise.

"There is no knowing," went on the banker, "how the world will take it. It is one of our greatest financial difficulties that there is never any knowing how the world will take anything. Of course, we in the City are plain-going men, who have no handles to our names and no time for the fashionable fads. We are only respectable, and we cannot afford to be mixed up in such a scheme as

your malgamite business." Mr. Wade glanced at Cornish and paused a moment. He was a stolid Englishman, who had received punishment in his time, and could hit hard when he deemed that hard hitting was merciful. "It has only been a question of time. The credulity of the public is such that, sooner or later, a bogus charity must assuredly have followed in the wake of the thousand bogus companies that exist to-day. I only wonder that it has not come sooner. You and Ferriby and, of course, the women have been swindled, my dear Tony—that is the head and the tail of it."

Cornish laughed gaily. "I dare say we have," he admitted. "But I will be hanged if I see what it all means, now."

"It may mean ruin to those who have anything to lose," explained Mr. Wade, calmly. "The whole thing has been cleverly planned—one of the cleverest things of recent years, and the man who thought it out had the makings of a great financier in him. What he wanted to do was to get the malgamite industry into his own hands. If he had formed a company and gone about it in a straightforward manner, the paper-makers of the whole world would have risen like one man and smashed him. Instead of that, he moved with the times, and ran the thing as a charity—a fashionable amusement, in fact. The malgamite industry is neither better nor worse than the other dangerous trades, and no man need go into it unless he likes.

But the man who started this thing—whoever he may be—supplied that picturesqueness without which the public cannot be moved—and lo! we have an army of martyrs."

Mr. Wade paused and jerked the ash from his cigar. He glanced at Cornish.

"No one suspected that there was anything wrong. It was plausibly put forth, and Ferriby . . . did his best for it. Then the money began to come in, and once money begins to come in for a popular charity the difficulty is to stop it. I suppose it is still coming in?"

"Yes," said Cornish. "It is still coming in, and nobody is trying to stop it."

Mr. Wade laughed in his throat, as fat men do. "And," he cried, sitting upright and banging his heavy fist down on the arm of his chair—"and there are millions in your malgamite works at the Hague—millions. If it were only honest it would be the finest monopoly the world has ever seen—for two years, but no longer. At the end of that period the paper-makers will have had time to combine and make their own stuff—then they'll smash you. But during those two years all the makers in the world will have to buy your malgamite at the price you chose to put upon it. They have their forward contracts to fulfil—government contracts, Indian contracts, newspaper contracts. Thousands and thousands of tons of paper will have to be manufactured at a loss every week during the

next two years, or they'll have to shut up their mills. Now do you see where you are?"

"Yes," answered Cornish, "I see where I am, now."

His face was drawn and his eyes hard, like those of a man facing ruin. And that which was written on his face was an old story, so old that some may not think it worth telling; for he had found out (as all who are fortunate will, sooner or later, discover) that success or failure, riches or poverty, greatness or obscurity, are but small things in a man's life. Mr. Wade looked at his companion with a sort of wonder in his shrewd old face. He had seen ruined men before now—he had seen criminals convicted of their wrong-doing—he had seen old and young in adversity, and, what is more dangerous still, in prosperity—but he had never seen a young face grow old in the twinkling of an eye. The banker was only thinking of this matter as a financial crisis, in which his great skill made him take a master's delight. There must inevitably come a great crash, and Mr. Wade's interest was aroused. Cornish was realizing that the crash would of a certainty fall between himself and Dorothy.

"This thing," continued the banker, judicially, "has not evolved itself. It is not the result of a singular chain of circumstances. It is the deliberate and careful work of one man's brain. This sort of speculative gambling comes to us from America. It was in America that the first cotton corner was

conceived. That is what the paper means when it plainly calls it the malgamite corner. Now, what I want to know is this—who has worked this thing?"

"Percy Roden," answered Cornish, thoughtfully.

"It is Roden's corner."

"Then Roden's a clever fellow," said the great financier. "That sort of man who will die a millionaire or a felon—there is no medium for that sort. He has conducted the thing with consummate skill—has not made a mistake yet. For I have watched him. He began well, by saying just enough and not too much. He went abroad, but not too far abroad. He avoided a suspicious remoteness. Then he bided his time with a fine patience, and at the right moment converted it quietly into a company—with a capital subscribed by the charitable—a splendid piece of audacity. I saw the announcement in the newspaper, neatly worded, and issued at the precise moment when the public interest was beginning to wane, and before the thing was forgotten. People read it, and having found a new plaything—bicycles, I suppose—did not care two pins what became of the malgamite scheme, and yet they were not left in a position to be able to say that they had never heard that the thing had been turned into a company." The banker rubbed his large soft hands together with a grim appreciation of this misapplied skill, which so few could recognize at its full value. "But," he continued, in his deliberate practical way, as if in the course of his

experience he had never yet met a difficulty which could not be overcome, "it is more our concern to think about the future. The difficulty you are in would be bad enough in itself—it is made a hundred times worse by the fact that you have a man like Roden, with all the trumps in his hand, waiting for you to throw the first card. Of course, I know no details yet, but I soon shall. What seems complicated to you may appear simple enough to me. I am going to stand by you—understand that, Tony. Through thick and thin. But I am going to stand behind you. I can hit harder from there. And this is just one of those affairs with which my name must not be associated. So far as I can judge at present, there seems to be only one course open to you, and that is to abandon the whole affair as quietly and expeditiously as possible, to drop malgamite and the hope of benefiting the malgamite workers once and for all."

Tony was looking at his watch. It was, it appeared, time for him to go if he wanted to catch his train.

"No," he said, rising; "I will be d——d if I do that."

Mr. Wade looked at him curiously, as one may look at a sleeper who for no apparent reason suddenly wakes and stretches himself.

"Ah!" he said slowly, and that was all.

CHAPTER XIV.

UNSOUND.

"Be wiser than other people if you can; but do not tell them so."

If Major White was not a man of quick comprehension, he was, at all events, honest in his density. He never said that he understood when he did not do so. When he received a telegram in barracks at Dover to come up to London the next day and meet Cornish at his club at one o'clock, the major merely said that he was in a state of condemnation, and fixing his glass very carefully into his more surprised eye, studied the thin pink paper as if it were a unique and interesting proof of the advance of the human race. In truth, Major White never sent telegrams, and rarely received them. He blew out his cheeks and said a second time that he was damned. Then he threw the telegram into a wastepaper basket, which was rarely put to so legitimate a use; for the major never wrote letters if he could help it, and received so few that they hardly kept him supplied in pipe-lights.

He apparently had no intention of replying to Cornish's telegram, arguing very philosophically

in his mind that he would go if he could, and if he could not, it would not matter very much. A method of contemplating life, as a picture with a perspective to it, which may be highly recommended to fussy people who herald their paltry little comings and goings by a number of unnecessary communications.

Without, therefore, attempting a surmise as to the meaning of this summons, White took a morning train to London, and solemnly reported himself to the hall porter of a club in St. James's Street as the well-dressed throng was leisurely returning from church.

"Mr. Cornish told me to come and have lunch with him," he said, in his usual bald style, leaving explanations and superfluous questions to such as had time for luxuries of that description.

He was taken charge of by a button-boy, whose head reached the major's lowest waistcoat button, was deprived of his hat and stick, and practically commanded to wash his hands, to all of which he submitted under stolid and silent protest.

Then he was led upstairs, refusing absolutely to hurry, although urged most strongly thereto by the boy's example and manner of pausing a few steps higher up and looking back.

"Yes," said the major, when he had heard Cornish's story across the table, and during the consumption of a perfectly astonishing luncheon—"yes; half the trouble in this world comes from the incapacity

of the ordinary human being to mind his own business." He operated on a creaming Camembert cheese with much thoughtfulness, and then spoke again. "I should like you to tell me," he said, "what a couple of idiots like us have to do with these confounded malgamiters. We do not know anything about industry or workmen—or work, so far as that goes"—he paused and looked severely across the table—"especially you," he added.

Which was strictly true; for Tony Cornish was and always had been a graceful idler. He was one of those unfortunate men who possess influential relatives, than which there are few heavier handicaps in that game of life, where if there be any real scoring to be done, it must be compassed off one's own bat. To follow out the same inexpensive simile, influential relatives may get a man into a crack club, but they cannot elect him to the first eleven. So Tony Cornish, who had never done anything, but had waited vaguely for something to turn up that might be worth his while to seize, had no answer ready, and only laughed gaily in his friend's face.

"The first thing we must do," he said, very wisely leaving the past to take care of itself, "is to get old Ferriby out of it."

"'Cos he is a lord?"

"Partly."

"'Cos he is an ass?" suggested White, as a plausible alternative.

"Partly; but chiefly because he is not the sort of man we want if there is going to be a fight."

A momentary light gleamed in the major's eye, but it immediately gave place to a placid interest in the Camembert.

"If there is going to be a fight," he said, "I'm on."

In which trivial remark the major explained his whole life and mental attitude. And if the world only listened, instead of thinking what effect it is creating and what it is going to say next, it would catch men thus giving themselves away in their daily talk from morning till night. For Major White had always been "on" when there was fighting. By dint of exchanging and volunteering and asking, and generally bothering people in a thick-skinned, dull way, he always managed to get to the front, where his competitors—the handful of modern knights-errant who mean to make a career in the army, and inevitably succeed—were not afraid of him, and laughingly liked him. And the barrack-room balladists had discovered that White rhymes with Fight. And lo! another man had made a name for himself in a world that is already too full of names, so that in the paths of Fame the great must necessarily fall against each other.

After luncheon, in the smaller smoking-room, where they were alone, Cornish explained the situation at greater length to Major White, who did not even pretend to understand it.

"All I can make of it is that that loose-shouldered

chap Roden is a scoundrel," he said bluntly, from behind a great cigar, "and wants thumping. Now, if there's anything in that line——"

"No; but you must not tell him so," interrupted Cornish. "I wish to goodness I could make you understand that cunning can only be met by cunning, not by thumps, in these degenerate days. Old Wade has taken us by the hand, as I tell you. They come to town, by the way, to-morrow, and will be in Eaton Square for the rest of the season. He says that it is his business to meet the low cunning of the small solicitors and the noble army of company promoters, and it seems that he knows exactly what to do. At any rate, it is not expedient to thump Roden."

Major White shrugged his shoulders with much silent wisdom. He believed, it appeared, in thumps in face of any evidence in favour of milder methods.

"Deuced sorry for that girl," he said.

Cornish was lighting a cigarette. "What girl?" he asked quietly.

"Miss Roden, chap's sister. She knows her brother is a dark horse, but she wouldn't admit it, not if you were to kill her for it. Women"—the major paused in his great wisdom—"women are a rum lot."

Which, assuredly, no one is prepared to deny.

Cornish glanced at his companion through the cigarette smoke, and said nothing.

"However," continued the major, "I am at your service. Let us have the orders."

"To-morrow," answered Cornish, "is Monday, and therefore the Ferribys will be at home. You and I are to go to Cambridge Terrace about four o'clock to see my uncle. We will scare him out of the Malgamite business. Then we will go upstairs and settle matters with Joan. Wade and Marguerite will drop in about half-past four. Joan and Marguerite see a good deal of each other, you know. If we have any difficulty with my uncle, Wade will give him the *coup de grâce*, you understand. His word will have more weight than ours. We shall then settle on a plan of campaign, and clear out of my aunt's drawing-room before the crowd comes."

"And you will do the talking," stipulated Major White.

"Oh yes; I will do the talking. And now I must be off. I have a lot of calls to pay, and it is getting late. You will find me here to-morrow afternoon at a quarter to four."

Whereupon Major White took his departure, to appear again the next day in good time, placid and debonair—as he had appeared when called upon in various parts of the world, where things were stirring.

They took a hansom, for the afternoon was showery, and drove through the crowded streets. Even Cambridge Terrace, usually a quiet thoroughfare, was astir with traffic, for it was the height of

the season and a levee day. As the cab swung round into Cambridge Terrace, White suddenly pushed his stick up through the trap-door in the roof of the vehicle.

"Ninety-nine," he shouted to the driver in his great voice. "Not nine."

Then he threw himself back against the dingy blue cushions.

Cornish turned and looked at him in surprise. "Gone off your head?" he inquired. "It is nine—you know that well enough."

"Yes," answered White, "I know that, my good soul; but you could not see the door as I could when we came round the corner. Roden and Von Holzen are on the steps, coming out."

"Roden and Von Holzen in England?"

"Not only in England," said White, placidly, "but in Cambridge Terrace. And"—he paused, seeking a suitable remark among his small selection of conversational remnants—"and the fat is in the fire."

The cab had now stopped at the door of number ninety-nine. And if Roden or Von Holzen, walking leisurely down Cambridge Terrace, had turned during the next few moments, they would have seen a stationary hansom cab, with a large round face—mildly surprised, like a pink harvest moon—rising cautiously over the roof of it, watching them.

When the coast was clear, Cornish and White walked back to number nine. Lord Ferriby was at

home, and they were ushered into his study, an apartment which, like many other things appertaining to his lordship, was calculated to convey an erroneous impression. There were books upon the tables—the lives of great and good men. Pamphlets relating to charitable matters, missionary matters, and a thousand schemes for the amelioration of the human lot here and hereafter, lay about in profusion. This was obviously the den of a great philanthropist.

His lordship presently appeared, carrying a number of voting papers, which he threw carelessly on the table. He was, it seemed, a subscriber to many institutions for the blind, the maimed, and the halt.

"Ah!" he said, "I generally get through my work in the morning, but I find myself behindhand to-day. It is wonderful," he added, directing his conversation and his benevolent gaze towards White, "how busy an idle man may be."

"M—m—yes!" answered the major, with his stolid stare.

Cornish broke what threatened to be an awkward silence by referring at once to the subject in hand.

"It seems," he began, "that this Malgamite scheme is not what we took it to be."

Lord Ferriby looked surprised and slightly scandalized. Could it be possible for a fashionable charity to be anything but what it appeared to be? In his eyes, wandering from one face to the other, there

lurked the question as to whether they had seen Roden and Von Holzen quit his door a minute earlier. But no reference was made to those two gentlemen, and Lord Ferriby, who, as a chairman of many boards, was a master of the art of conciliation and the decent closing of both eyes to unsightly facts, received Cornish's suggestion with a polite and avuncular pooh-pooh.

"We must not," he said soothingly, "allow our judgment to be hastily affected by the ill-considered statements of the—er—newspapers. Such statements, my dear Anthony—and you, Major White—are, I may tell you, only what we, as the pioneers of a great movement, must be prepared to expect. I saw the article in the *Times* to which you refer—indeed, I read it most carefully, as, in my capacity of chairman of this—eh—char—that is to say, company, I was called upon to do. And I formed the opinion that the mind of the writer was—eh—warped."

Lord Ferriby smiled sadly, and gave a final wave of the hand, as if to indicate that the whole matter lay in a nutshell, and that nutshell under his lordship's heel.

"Warped or not," answered Cornish, "the man says that we have formed ourselves into a company, which company is bound to make huge profits, and those profits are naturally assumed to find their way into our pockets."

"My dear Anthony," replied the chairman, with a

laugh which was almost a cackle, "the labourer is worthy of his hire."

Which seems likely to become the *dernier cri* of the overpaid throughout all the ages.

"Even if we contradict the statement," pursued Cornish, with a sudden coldness in his manner, "the contradiction will probably fail to reach many of the readers of this article, and as matters at present stand, I do not see that we are in a position to contradict."

"My dear Anthony," answered Lord Ferriby, turning over his papers with a preoccupied air, as if the question under discussion only called for a small share of his attention—"my dear Anthony, the money was subscribed for the amelioration of the lot of the malgamite workers. We have not only ameliorated their lot, but we have elevated them morally and physically. We have far exceeded our promises, and the subscribers, who, after all, take a small interest in the matter, have every reason to be satisfied that their money has been applied to the purpose for which they intended it. They were kind enough to intrust us with the financial arrangements. The concern is a private one, and it is the business of no one—not even of the *Times*—to inquire into the method which we think well to adopt for the administration of the Malgamite Fund. If the subscribers had no confidence in us, they surely would not have given the management unreservedly into our hands."

Lord Ferriby spread out the limbs in question with an easy laugh. Has not a greater than any of us said that a man "may smile, and smile, and be a villain"?

A silence followed, which was almost, but not quite, broken by the major, who took his glass from his eye, examined it very carefully, as if wondering how it had been made, and, replacing it with a deep sigh, sat staring at the opposite wall.

"Then you are not disposed to withdraw your name from the concern?" asked Cornish.

"Most certainly not, my dear Anthony. What have the malgamiters done that I should, so to speak, abandon them at the first difficulty which has presented itself?"

"And what about the profits?" inquired Cornish, bluntly.

"Mr. Roden is our paid secretary. He understands the financial situation, which is rather a complicated one. We may, I think, leave such details to him. And if I may suggest it (I may perhaps rightly lay claim to a somewhat larger experience in charitable finances than either of you), I should recommend a strict reticence on this matter. We are not called upon to answer idle questions, I think. And if—well—if the labourer is found worthy of his hire . . . buy yourself a new hat, my dear Anthony. Buy yourself a new hat."

Cornish rose, and looked at his watch. "I won-

der if Joan will give us a cup of tea," he said. "We might, at all events, go up and try."

"Certainly—certainly. And I will follow when I have finished my work. And do not give the matter another thought—either of you—eh!"

"He's been got at," said Major White to his companion as they walked upstairs together, as if Lord Ferriby were a jockey or some common person of that sort.

CHAPTER XV.

PLAIN SPEAKING.

"Il est rare que la tête des rois soit faite à la mesure de leur couronne."

"WHAT I want is something to eat," Miss Marguerite Wade confided in an undertone to Tony Cornish, a few minutes later in Lady Ferriby's drawing-room. She said this with a little glance of amusement, as Cornish stood before her with two plates of biscuits, which certainly did not promise much sustenance.

"Then," answered Cornish, "you have come to the wrong house."

Marguerite kept him waiting while she arranged biscuits in her saucer. He set the plates aside, and returned to her in answer to her tacit order, conveyed by laying one hand on a vacant chair by her side. Marguerite was in the midst of that brief period of a woman's life wherein she dares to state quite clearly what she wants.

"Why don't you marry Joan?" she asked, eating a biscuit with a fine young optimism, which

almost implied that things sometimes taste as nice as they look.

"Why don't you marry Major White?" retorted Tony; and Marguerite turned and looked at him gravely.

"For a man," she said, "that wasn't so dusty. So few men have any eyes in their head, you know." And she thoughtfully finished the biscuits. "I think I'll go back to the bread-and-butter," she said. "It's the last time Lady Ferriby will ask me to stay to tea, so I may as well be hanged for —threepence as three-farthings. And I think I will be more careful with you in the future. For a man, you are rather sharp." And she looked at him doubtfully.

"When you attain my age," replied Tony, "you will have arrived at the conclusion that the whole world is sharper than one took it to be. It does not do to think that the world is blind. It is better not to care whether it sees or not."

"Women cannot afford to do that," returned Marguerite, with the accumulated wisdom of nearly a score of years. "Oh, hang!" she added, a moment later, under her breath, as she perceived Joan and Major White coming towards them.

"I have a letter for you," said Joan, "enclosed in one I received this morning from Mrs. Vansittart at the Hague. She is not coming to the Haberdashers' Assistants' Ball, and this is, I suppose, in answer to the card you sent her. She explains

that she did not know your address." And Joan looked at him with a doubting glance for a moment.

Cornish took the letter, but did not ask permission to open it. He held it in his hand, and asked Joan a question.

"Did you see Saturday's *Times?*"

"Yes, of course I did," she answered earnestly; "and of course, if it is true you will all wash your hands of the whole affair, I suppose. I was talking to Mr. Wade about it. He, however, placed both sides of the question before me in about ten words, and left me to take my choice—which I am incompetent to do."

"Papa doesn't understand women," put in Marguerite.

"Understands money, though," retorted Major White, looking at her in somewhat severe astonishment, as if he had hitherto been unaware that she could speak.

Marguerite took the rebuff with demurely closed lips, a probable indication that the only retort she could think of was hardly fit for enunciation.

Then Cornish drifted out of the conversation, and presently moved away to the window, where he took the opportunity of opening Mrs. Vansittart's letter. Mr. Wade, near at hand, was explaining good-naturedly to Lady Ferriby that, with the best will in the world, five per cent. and perfect safety are not to be obtained nowadays.

"MON AMI" (wrote Mrs. Vansittart in French),

"I take a daily promenade after coffee in the Oude Weg. I sit on the bench where you sat, and more often than not I see the sight that you saw. I am not a sentimental woman, but, after all, one has a heart, and this is a pitiful affair. Also, I have obtained from a reliable source the information that the new system of manufacture is more deadly than the old, which I have long suspected, and which, I believe, has passed through your mind as well. You and I went into this thing without *le bon motif;* but Providence is dealing out fresh hands, and you, at all events, hold cards that call for careful and bold playing. My friend, throw your Haberdashers over the wall and act without delay.

"E. V."

She enclosed a formal refusal of the invitation to the Haberdashers' Assistants' Ball.

Major White was not a talkative man, and towards Joan in particular his attitude was one of silent wonder. In preference to talking to her, he preferred to stand a little way off and look at her. And if, at these moments, the keen observer could detect any glimmer of expression on his face, that glimmer seemed to express abject abasement before a creation that could produce anything so puzzling, so interesting, so absolutely beautiful —as Joan.

Cornish, seeing White engaged in his favourite pastime, took him by the arm and led him to the window.

"Read that," he said, "and then burn it."

"Of course," Joan was saying to Marguerite, as he joined them, "there are, as your father says, two sides to the question. If papa and Tony and Major White withdraw their names and abandon the poor malgamiters now, there will be no help for the miserable wretches. They will all drift back to the cheaper and more poisonous way of making malgamite. And such a thing would be a blot upon our civilization—wouldn't it, Tony?"

Marguerite nodded an airy acquiescence. She was watching Major White—that great strategist—tear up Mrs. Vansittart's letter and throw it into the fire, with a deliberate non-concealment which was perhaps superior to any subterfuge. The major joined the group.

"That is the view that I take of it," answered Tony.

"And what do *you* say?" asked Joan, turning upon the major.

"I? Oh, nothing!" replied that soldier, with perfect truthfulness.

"Then what are you going to do?" asked Joan, who was practical, and, like many practical people, rather given to hasty action.

"We are going to stick to the malgamiters," replied Tony, quietly.

"Through thick and thin?" inquired Marguerite, buttoning her glove.

"Yes—through thick and thin."

Both girls looked at Major White, who stolidly returned their gaze, and appeared as usual to have no remark to offer. He was saved, indeed, from all effort in that direction by the advent of Lord Ferriby, who entered the room with more than his usual importance. He carried an open letter in his hand, and seemed by his manner to demand the instant attention of the whole party. There are some men and a few women who live for the multitude, and are not content with the attention of one or two persons only. And surely these have their reward, for the attention of the multitude, however pleasant it may be while it lasts, is singularly short-lived, and there is nothing more pitiful to watch than the effort to catch it when it has wandered.

"Eh—er," began his lordship, and everybody paused to listen. "I have here a letter from our clerk at the Malgamite office in Great George Street. It appears that there are a number of persons there —paper-makers, I understand—who insist upon seeing us, and refuse to leave the premises until they have done so."

Lord Ferriby's manner indicated quite clearly his pity for these persons who had proved themselves capable of such a shocking breach of good manners.

"One hardly knows what to do," he said, not

meaning, of course, that his words should be taken *au pied de la lettre*. His hearers, he obviously felt assured, knew him better than to imagine that he was really at a loss. "It is difficult to deal with—er—persons of this description. What do you propose that we should do?" he inquired, turning, as if by instinct, to Cornish.

"Go and see them," was the reply.

"But, my dear Anthony, such a crisis should be dealt with by Mr. Roden, whom one may regard as our—er—financial adviser."

"But as Roden is not here, we must do without his assistance. Perhaps Mr. Wade would consent to act as our financial adviser on this occasion," suggested Cornish.

"I'll go with you," replied the banker, "and hear what they have to say, if you like. But of course I can take no part in anything in the nature of a controversy, and my name must not be mentioned."

"Incognito," suggested Lord Ferriby, with a forced laugh.

"Yes—incognito," returned the banker, gravely.

The major attracted general attention to himself by murmuring something inaudible, which he was urged to repeat.

"Doocid decent of Mr. Wade," he said, a second time.

And that seemed to settle the matter, for they all moved towards the door.

"Leave the carriage for me," cried Marguerite over the banisters, as her father descended the stairs. "Seems to me," she added to Joan in an undertone, "that the Malgamite scheme is up a gum-tree."

At the little office of the Malgamite Fund the directors of that charity found four gentlemen seated upon the chairs usually grouped round the table where the ball committee or the bazaar sub-committees held their sittings. One, who appeared to be what Lord Ferriby afterwards described, more in sorrow than in anger, as the ringleader, was a red-haired, brown-bearded Scotchman, with square shoulders and his head set thereon in a manner indicative of advanced radical opinions. The second in authority was a mild-mannered man with a pale face and a drooping sparse moustache. He had a gentle eye, and lips for ever parting in a mildly argumentative manner. The other two paper-makers appeared to be foreigners.

"Ah'm thinking——" began the mild man in a long drawl; but he was promptly overpowered by his fellow-countryman, who nodded curtly to Mr. Wade, and said—

"Lord Ferriby?"

"No," answered the banker, calmly.

"That is my name," said the chairman of the Malgamite Fund, with his finger in his watch-chain.

The russet gentleman looked at him with a fierce blue eye.

"Then, sir," he said, "we'll come to business. For it's on business that we've come. My friend Mr. MacHewlett is, like myself, in charge of one of the biggest mills in the country; here's Mossier Delmont of the great mill at Clermont-Ferrand, and Mr. Meyer from Germany. My own name's a plain one—like myself—but an honest one; it's John Thompson."

Lord Ferriby bowed, and Major White looked at John Thompson with a placid interest, as if he felt glad of this opportunity of meeting one of the Thompson family.

"And we've come to ask you to be so good as to explain your position as regards malgamite. What are ye, anyway?"

"My dear sir," began Lord Ferriby, with one hand upraised in mild expostulation, "let us be a little more conciliatory in our manner. We are, I am sure (I speak for myself and my fellow-directors, whom you see before you), most desirous of avoiding any unpleasantness, and we are ready to give you all the information in our power, when" —he paused, and waved a graceful hand—"when you have proved your right to demand such information."

"Our right is that of representatives of a great trade. We four men, that have been deputed to see you on the matter, have at our backs no less

than eight thousand employés—honest, hard-workin' men, whose bread you are taking out of their mouths. We are not afraid of the ordinary vicissitudes of commerce. If ye had quietly worked this monopoly in fair competition, we should have known how to meet ye. But ye come before the world as philanthropists, and ye work a great monopoly under the guise of doin' a good work. It was a dirty thing to do."

Lord Ferriby shrugged his shoulders. "My dear sir," he said, "you fail to grasp the situation. We have given our time and attention to the grievances of these poor men, whose lot it has been our earnest endeavour to ameliorate. You are speaking, my dear sir, to men who represent, not eight thousand employés, but who represent something greater than they, namely, charity."

"Ah'm thinking!" began Mr. MacHewlett, plaintively, and the very richness of his accents secured a breathless attention. "Damn charity," he concluded, abruptly.

And Major White looked upon him in solid approval, as upon a plain-spoken man, after his own heart.

"And we," said Mr. Thompson, "represent commerce, which was in the world before charity, and will be there after it, if charity is going to be handled by such as you."

There was, it appeared, no possibility of pacifying these irate paper-makers, whose plainness of speech

was positively painful to ears so polite as those of Lord Ferriby. A Scotchman, hard hit in his tenderest spot, namely, the pocket, is not a person to mince words, and Lord Ferriby was for the moment silenced by the stormy attack of Mr. Thompson, and the sly, plaintive hits of his companion. But the chairman of the Malgamite Fund would not give way, and only repeated his assurances of a desire to conciliate, which desire took the form only of words, and must, therefore, have been doubly annoying to angry men. To him who wants war there is nothing more insulting than feeble offers of peace. Major White expressed his readiness to fight Messrs. Thompson and MacHewlett at one and the same time on the landing, but this suggestion was not well received.

Upon two of the listeners no word was lost, and Mr. Wade and Cornish knew that the paper-makers had right upon their side.

Quite suddenly Mr. Thompson's manner changed, and he glanced towards the door to see that it was closed.

"Then it's a matter of paying," he said to his companions. Turning towards Lord Ferriby, he spoke in a voice that sounded more contemptuous than angry. "We're plain business men," he said. "What's your price—you and these other gentlemen?"

"I have no price," answered Cornish, meeting the angry blue eyes and speaking for the first time.

"And mine is too high—for plain business men," added Major White, with a slow smile.

"Seeing that you're a lord," said Thompson, addressing the chairman again, "I suppose it's a matter of thousands. Name your figure, and be done with it."

Lord Ferriby took the insult in quite a different spirit to that displayed by his two co-directors. He was pale with anger, and spluttered rather incoherently. Then he took up his hat and stick and walked with much dignity to the door.

He was followed down the stairs by the paper-makers, Mr. Thompson making use of language that was decidedly bespattered with "winged words," while Mr. MacHewlett detailed his own thoughts in a plaintive monotone. Lord Ferriby got rather hastily into a hansom and drove away.

"There is nothing for it," said Mr. Wade to Cornish in the gay little office above the Ladies' Tea Association—"there is nothing for it but to run Roden's Corner yourself."

CHAPTER XVI.

DANGER.

"The first and worst of all frauds is to cheat one's self."

PERCY RODEN was possessed of that love of horses which, like sentiment, crops up in strange places. He had never been able to indulge this taste beyond the doubtful capacities of the livery-stable. He found, however, that at the Hague he could hire a good saddle-horse, which discovery was made with suspicious haste after learning the fact that Mrs. Vansittart occasionally indulged in the exercise that his soul loved.

Mrs. Vansittart said that she rode because one has to take exercise, and riding is the laziest method of fulfilling one's obligations in this respect.

"I don't like horsy women," she said; "and I cannot understand how my sex has been foolish enough to believe that any woman looks her best, or, indeed, anything but her worst, in the saddle."

There is a period in the lives of most men when they are desirous of extending their knowledge of the surrounding country on horseback, on a bicycle, on foot, or even on their hands and knees, if such

journeys might be accomplished in the company of a certain person. Percy Roden was at this period, and he soon discovered that there are tulip farms in the neighbourhood of the Hague. A tulip farm may serve its purpose as well as ever did a ruin or a waterfall in more picturesque countries than Holland; for, indeed, during the last weeks in April and the early half of May, these fields of waving yellow, pink, and red are worth travelling many miles to see. As for Mrs. Vansittart, it may be said of her, as of the rest of her sex, under similar circumstances, that it suited her purpose to say that she would like nothing better than to visit the tulip farms.

Roden's suggestion included breakfast at the Villa des Dunes, whither Mrs. Vansittart drove in her habit, while her saddle-horse was to follow later. Dorothy welcomed her readily enough, with, however, a reserve at the back of her grey eyes. A woman is, it appears, ready to forgive much if love may be held out as an excuse, but Dorothy did not believe that Mrs. Vansittart had any love for Percy; indeed, she shrewdly suspected that all that part of this woman's life belonged to the past, and would remain there until the end of her existence. There are few things more astonishing to the close observer of human nature than the accuracy and rapidity with which one woman will sum up another.

"You are not in your habit," said Mrs. Vansittart, seating herself at the breakfast-table. "You are not to be of the party?"

"No," answered Dorothy. "I have never had the opportunity or the inclination to ride."

"Ah, I know," laughed the elder woman. "Horses are old-fashioned, and only dowagers drive in a barouche to-day. I suppose you ride a bicycle, or would do so in any country but Holland, where the roads make that craze a madness. I must be content with my old-fashioned horse. If, in moving with the times, one's movements are apt to be awkward, it is better to be left behind, is it not, Mr. Roden?"

Roden's glance expressed what he did not care to say in the presence of a third person. When a woman, whose every movement is graceful, speaks of awkwardness, she assuredly knows her ground.

Mrs. Vansittart, moreover, showed clearly enough that she was on the safe side of forty by quite a number of years when it came to settling herself in the saddle and sitting her fresh young horse.

"Which way?" she inquired, when they reached the canal.

"Not that way, at all events," answered Roden, for his companion had turned her horse's head toward the malgamite works.

He spoke with a laugh that was not pleasant to the ears, and a shadow passed through Mrs. Vansittart's dark eyes. She glanced across the yellow sand hills, where the works were effectually concealed by the rise and fall of the wind-swept land, from whence came no sign of human life, and only at times, when

the north wind blew, a faint and not unpleasant odour like the smell of sealing-wax. For all that the world knew of the malgamite workers, they might have been a colony of lepers.

"You speak," said Mrs. Vansittart, "as it you were a failure instead of a brilliant success. I think"—she paused for a moment, as if the thought were a real one and not a mere conversational convenience, as are the thoughts of most people—"that the cream of social life consists of the cheery failures."

"I have no faith in my own luck," answered Percy Roden, gloomily, whose world was a narrow one, consisting as it did of himself and his bank-book. Moreover, most men draw aside readily enough the curtain that should hide the world in which they live, whereas women take their stand before their curtain and talk, and talk—of other things.

Mrs. Vansittart had never for a moment been mistaken in her estimate of her companion, of—as he considered himself—her lover. She had absolutely nothing in common with him. She was a physically lazy, but a mentally active woman, whose thoughts ran to abstract matters so persistently that they brought her to the verge of abstraction itself.

Percy Roden, on the other hand, would, with better health, have been an athlete. In his youth he had overtaxed his strength on the football field. When he took up a newspaper now he read the money column first and the sporting items next.

Mrs. Vansittart glanced at neither of these, and as

often as not contented herself with the advertisements of new books, passing idly over the news of the world with a heedless eye. She, at all events, avoided the mistake, common to men and women of a journalistic generation, of allowing themselves to be vastly perturbed over events in far countries, which can in no way effect their lives.

Roden, on the other hand, took a certain broad interest in the progress of the world, but only watched the daily procession of events with the discriminating eye of a business man. He kept his eye, in a word, on the main chance, as on a small golden thread woven in the grey tissue of the world's history.

It was easy enough to make him talk of himself and of the Malgamite scheme.

"And you must admit that you are a success, you know," said Mrs. Vansittart. "I see your quiet grey carts, full of little square boxes, passing up Park Straat to the railway station in a procession every day."

"Yes" admitted Roden. "We are doing a large business."

He was willing to allow Mrs. Vansittart to suppose that he was a rich man, for he was shrewd enough to know that the affections, like all else in this world, are purchasable.

"And there is no reason," suggested Mrs. Vansittart, "why you should not go on doing a large business, as you say your method of producing malgamite is an absolute secret."

"Absolute."

"And the process is preserved in your memory only?" asked the lady, with a little glance towards him which would have awakened the vanity of wiser men than Percy Roden.

"Not in my memory," he answered. "It is very long and technical, and I have other things to think of. It is in Von Holzen's head, which is a better one than mine."

"And suppose Herr von Holzen should fall down and die, or be murdered, or something dramatic of that sort—what would happen?"

"Ah," answered Roden, "we have a written copy of it, written in Hebrew, in our small safe at the works, and only Von Holzen and I have the keys of the safe."

Mrs. Vansittart laughed. "It sounds like a romance," she said. She pulled up, and sat motionless in the saddle for a few moments. "Look at that line of sea," she said, "on the horizon. What a wonderful blue."

"It is always dark like that with an east wind," replied Roden, practically. "We like to see it dark."

Mrs. Vansittart turned and looked at him interrogatively, her mind only half-weaned from the thoughts which he never understood.

"Because we know that the smell of malgamite will be blown out to sea," he explained; and she gave a little nod of comprehension.

"You think of everything," she said, without enthusiasm.

"No; I only think of you," he answered, with a little laugh, which indeed was his method of making love.

For fear of Mrs. Vansittart laughing at him, he laughed at love—a very common form of cowardice. She smiled and said nothing, thus tacitly allowing him, as she had allowed him before, to assume that she was not displeased. She knew that in love he was the incarnation of caution, and would only venture so far as she encouraged him to come. She had him, in a word, thoroughly in hand.

They rode on, talking of other things; and Roden, having sped his shaft, seemed relieved in mind, and had plenty to say—about himself. A man's interests are himself, and malgamite naturally formed a large part of Roden's conversation. Mrs. Vansittart encouraged him with a singular persistency to talk of this interesting product.

"It is wonderful," she said—"quite wonderful."

"Well, hardly that," he answered slowly, as if there were something more to be said, which he did not say.

"And I do not give so much credit to Herr von Holzen as you suppose," added Mrs. Vansittart, carelessly. "Some day you will have to fulfil your promise of taking me over the works."

Roden did not answer. He was perhaps wonder-

ing when he had made the promise to which his companion referred.

"Shall we go home that way?" asked Mrs. Vansittart, whose experience of the world had taught her that deliberate and steady daring in social matters usually succeeds. "We might have a splendid gallop along the sands at low tide, and then ride up quietly through the dunes. I take a certain interest in—well—in your affairs, and you have never even allowed me to look at the outside of the malgamite works."

"Should like to know the extent of your interest," muttered Roden, with his awkward laugh.

"I dare say you would," replied Mrs. Vansittart, coolly. "But that is not the question. Here we are at the cross-roads. Shall we go home by the sands and the dunes?"

"If you like," answered Roden, not too graciously.

According to his light, he was honestly in love with Mrs. Vansittart, but Percy Roden's lights were not brilliant, and his love was not a very high form of that little-known passion. It lacked, for instance, unselfishness, and love that lacks unselfishness is, at its best, a sorry business. He was afraid of ridicule. His vanity would not allow him to risk a rebuff. His was that faintness of heart which is all too common, and owes its ignoble existence to a sullen vanity. He wanted to be sure that Mrs. Vansittart loved him before he betrayed more than a half-contemptuous admiration for her. Who knows that

he was not dimly aware of his own inferiority, and thus feared to venture?

The tide was low, as Mrs. Vansittart had foreseen, and they galloped along the hard, flat sands towards Scheveningen, where a few clumsy fishing-boats lay stranded. Far out at sea, others plied their trade, tacking to and fro over the banks, where the fish congregate. The sky was clear, and the deep-coloured sea flashed here and there beneath the sun. Objects near and far stood out in the clear air with a startling distinctness. It was a fresh May morning, when it is good to be alive, and better to be young.

Mrs. Vansittart rode a few yards ahead of her companion, with a set face and deep calculating eyes. When they came within sight of the tall chimney of the pumping-station, it was she who led the way across the dunes.

"Now," she suddenly inquired, pulling up, and turning in her saddle, "where are your works? It seems that one can never discover them."

Roden passed her and took the lead. "I will take you there, since you are so anxious to go—if you will tell me why you wish to see the works," he said.

"I should like to know," she answered, with averted eyes and a slow deliberation, "where and how you spend so much of your time."

"I believe you are jealous of the malgamite works," he said, with his curt laugh.

"Perhaps I am," she admitted, without meeting his glance; and Roden rode ahead, with a gleam of satisfaction in his heavy eyes.

So Mrs. Vansittart found herself within the gates of the malgamite works, riding quietly on the silent sand, at the heels of Roden's horse.

The workmen's dinner-bell had rung as they approached and now the factories were deserted, while within the cottages the midday meal occupied the full attention of the voluntary exiles. For the directors had found it necessary, in the interests of all concerned, to bind the workers by solemn contract never to leave the precincts of the works without permission.

Roden did not speak, but led the way across an open space now filled with carts, which were to be loaded during the day in readiness for an early despatch on the following morning. Mrs. Vansittart followed without asking questions. She was prepared to content herself with a very cursory visit.

They had not progressed thirty yards from the entrance gate, which Roden had opened with a key attached to his watch-chain, when the door of one of the cottages moved, and Von Holzen appeared. He was hatless, and came out into the sunshine rather hurriedly.

"Ah, madame," he said, "you honour us beyond our merits." And he stood, smiling gravely, in front of Mrs. Vansittart's horse.

She surreptitiously touched the animal with her heel, but Von Holzen checked its movement by laying his hand on the bridle.

"Alas!" he said, "it happens to be our mixing day, and the factories are hermetically closed while the process goes forward. Any other day, madame, that your fancy brings you over the dunes, I should be delighted—but not to-day. I tell you frankly there is danger. You surely would not run into it." He looked up at her with his searching gaze.

"Ah! you think it is easy to frighten me, Herr von Holzen," cried she, with a little laugh.

"No; but I would not for the world that you should unwittingly run any risks in this place."

As he spoke, he led the horse quietly to the gate, and Mrs. Vansittart, seeing her helplessness, submitted with a good grace.

Roden made no comment, and followed, not ill pleased, perhaps, at this simple solution of his difficulty.

Von Holzen did not refer to the incident until late in the evening, when Roden was leaving the works.

"This is too serious a time," he said, "to let women, or vanity, interfere in our plans. You know that the deaths are on the increase. Anything in the nature of an inquiry at this time would mean ruin, and—perhaps worse. Be careful of that

woman. I sometimes think that she is fooling you.—But I think," he added to himself, when the gate was closed behind Roden, "that I can fool her."

CHAPTER XVII.

PLAIN SPEAKING.

"A tous maux, il y a deux remèdes—le temps et le silence."

"THEY call me Uncle Ben—comprenny?" one man explained very slowly to another for the sixth time across a small iron table set out upon the pavement.

They were seated in front of the humble Café de l'Europe, which lies concealed in an alley that runs between the Keize Straat and the lighthouse of Scheveningen. It was quite dark, and a lonely reveller at the next table seemed to be asleep. The economical proprietor of the Café de l'Europe had conceived the idea of constructing a long-shaped lantern, not unlike the arm of a railway signal, which should at once bear the insignia of his house, and afford light to his out-door custom. But the idea, like many of the higher flights of the human imagination, had only left the public in the dark.

"Yes," continued the unchallenged speaker, in a voice which may be heard issuing from the door of any tavern in England on almost any evening

of the week—the typical voice of the tavern-talker —"yes, they've always called me Uncle Ben. Seems as if they're sort o' fond of me. Me as has seen many hundreds of 'em come and go. But nothing like this. Lord save us!"

His hand fell heavily on the iron table, and he looked round him in semi-intoxicated stupefaction. He was in a confidential humour, and when a man is in this humour, drunk or sober, he is in a parlous state. It was certainly rather unfortunate that Uncle Ben should have in this expansive moment no more sympathetic companion than an ancient, intoxicated Frenchman, who spoke no word of English.

"What I want to know, Frenchy," continued the Englishman, in a thick, aggrieved voice, "is how long you've been at this trade, and how much you know about it—you and the other Frenchy. But there's none of us speaks the other's lingo. It is a regular Tower of Babble we are!" And Uncle Ben added to his mental confusion a further alcoholic fog. "That's why I showed yer the way out of the works over the iron fence by the empty casks, and brought yer by the beach to this 'ere house of entertainment, and stood yer a bottle of brandy between two of us—which is handsome, not bein' my own money, seeing as how the others deputed me to do it—me knowing a bit of French, comprenny?" Benjamin, like most of his countrymen, considering that if one speaks English in a loud, clear voice, and adds "comprenny" rather

severely, as indicating the intention of standing no nonsense, the previous remarks will translate themselves miraculously in the hearer's mind. "You comprenny—eh? Yes. Oui."

"Oui," replied the Frenchman, holding out his glass; and Uncle Ben's was that pride which goes with a gift of tongues.

He struck a match to light his pipe—one of the wooden, sulphur-headed matches supplied by the *café*—and the guest at the next table turned in his chair. The match flared up and showed two faces, which he studied keenly. Both faces were alike unwashed and deeply furrowed. White, straggling beards and whiskers accentuated the redness of the eyelids, the dull yellow of the skin. They were hopeless and debased faces, with that disquieting resemblance which is perceptible in the faces of men of dissimilar features and no kinship, who have for a number of years followed a common calling, or suffered a common pain.

These two men were both half blind; they had equally unsteady hands. The clothing of both alike, and even their breath, was scented by a not unpleasant odour of sealing-wax.

It was quite obvious that not only were they at present half intoxicated, but in their soberest moments they could hardly be of a high intelligence.

The reveller at the next table, who happened to be Tony Cornish, now drew his chair nearer.

"Englishman?" he inquired.

"That's me," answered Uncle Ben, with commendable pride, "from the top of my head to me boots. Not that I've anything to say against foreigners."

"Nor I; but it's pleasant to meet a countryman in a foreign land." Cornish deliberately brought his chair forward. "Your bottle is empty," he added; "I'll order another. Friend's a Frenchman, eh?"

"That he is—and doesn't understand his own language either," answered Uncle Ben, in a voice indicating that that lack of comprehension rather intensified his friend's Frenchness than otherwise.

The proprietor of the Café de l'Europe now came out in answer to Cornish's rap on the iron table, and presently brought a small bottle of brandy.

"Yes," said Cornish, pouring out the spirit, which his companions drank in its undiluted state from small tumblers—"yes, I'm glad to meet an Englishman. I suppose you are in the works—the Malgamite?"

"I am. And what do you know about malgamite, mister?"

"Well, not much, I am glad to say."

"There is precious few that knows anything," said the man, darkly, and his eye for a moment sobered into cunning.

"I have heard that it is a very dangerous trade,

and if you want to get out of it I'm connected with an association in London to provide situations for elderly men who are no longer up to their work," said Cornish, carelessly.

"Thank ye, mister; not for me. I'm making my five-pound note a week, I am, and each cove that dies off makes the survivors one richer, so to speak—survival of the fittest, they call it. So we don't talk much, and just pockets the pay."

"Ah, that is the arrangement, is it?" said Cornish, indifferently.

"Yes. We've got a clever financier, as they call it, I can tell yer. We're a good-goin' concern, we are. Some of us are goin' pretty quick, too."

"Are there many deaths, then?"

"Ah! there you're asking a question," returned the man, who came of a class which has no false shame in refusing a reply.

Cornish looked at the man beneath the dim light of the unsuccessful lamp—a piteous specimen of humanity, depraved, besotted, without outward sign of a redeeming virtue, although a certain courage must have been there—this and such as this stood between him and Dorothy Roden. Uncle Ben had known starvation at one time, for starvation writes certain lines which even turtle soup may never wipe out—lines which any may read and none may forget. Tony Cornish had seen them before—on the face of an old dandy coming down the steps of a St. James's Street club. The

malgamiter had likewise known drink long and intimately, and it is no exaggeration to say that he had stood cheek by jowl with death nearly all his life.

Such a man was plainly not to be drawn away from five pounds a week.

Cornish turned to the Frenchman—a little, cunning, bullet-headed Lyonnais, who would not speak of his craft at all, though he expressed every desire to be agreeable to monsieur.

"When one is *en fête*," he cried, "it is good to drink one's glass or two and think no more of work."

"I knew one or two of your men once," said Cornish, returning to the genial Uncle Ben. "William Martins, I remember, was a decent fellow, and had seen a bit of the world. I will come to the works and look him up some day."

"You can look him up, mister, but you won't find him."

"Ah, has he gone home?"

"He's gone to his long home, that's where he's gone."

"And his brother, Tom Martins, both London men, like myself?" inquired Cornish, without asking that question which Uncle Ben considered such exceedingly bad form.

"Tom's dead, too."

"And there were two Americans, I recollect—I came across from Harwich in the same boat with them—Hewlish they were called."

"Hewlishes has stepped round the corner, too," admitted Uncle Ben. "Oh yes; there's been changes in the works, there's no doubt. And there's only one sort o' change in the malgamite trade. Come on, Frenchy, time's up."

The men stood up and bade Cornish good night, each after his own manner, and went away steadily enough. It was only their heads that were intoxicated, and perhaps the brandy of the Café de l'Europe had nothing to do with this.

Cornish followed them, and, in the Keize Straat, he called a cab, telling the man to drive to the house at the corner of Oranje Straat and Park Straat, occupied by Mrs. Vansittart. That lady, the servant said, in reply to his careful inquiry, was at home and alone, and, moreover, did not expect visitors. The man was not at all sure that madame would receive.

"I will try," said Cornish, writing two words in German on the corner of his visiting-card. "You see," he continued, noticing a well-trained glance, "that I am not dressed, so if other visitors arrive, I would rather not be discovered in madame's *salon*, you understand?"

Mrs. Vansittart shook hands with Cornish in silence. Her quick eyes noted the change in him which the shrewd butler had noticed in the entrance-hall. The Cornish of a year earlier would have gone back to the hotel to dress.

"I was just going out to the Witte society con-

cert," said Mrs. Vansittart. "I thought the open air and the wood would be pleasant this evening. Shall we go or shall we remain?" She stood with her hand on the bell looking at him.

"Let us remain here," he answered.

She rang the bell and countermanded the carriage. Then she sat slowly down, moving as under a sort of oppression, as if she foresaw what the next few minutes contained, and felt herself on the threshold of one of the surprises that Fate springs upon us at odd times, tearing aside the veils behind which human hearts have slept through many years. For indifference is not the death, but only the sleep of the heart.

"You have just arrived?"

"No; I have been here a week."

"At the Hague?"

"No," answered Cornish, with a grave smile; "at a little inn in Scheveningen, where no questions are asked."

Mrs. Vansittart nodded her head slowly. "Then, *mon ami*," she said, "the time has come for plain speaking?"

"I suppose so."

"It is always the woman who wants to get to the plain speaking," she said, with a smile, "and who speaks the plainest when one gets there. You men are afraid of so many words; you think them, but you dare not make use of them. And how are women to know that you are thinking them?"

She spoke with a sort of tolerant bitterness, as if all these questions no longer interested her personally. She sat forward, with one hand on the arm of her chair. "Come," she said, with a little laugh that shook and trembled on the brink of a whole sea of unshed tears. "I will speak the first word. When my husband died, my heart broke —and it was Otto von Holzen who killed him." Her eyes flashed suddenly, and she threw herself back in the chair. Her hands were trembling.

Cornish made a quick gesture of the hand—a trick he had learnt somewhere on the Continent, more eloquent than a hundre dwords—which told of his sympathy and his comprehension of all that she had left unsaid. For truly she had told him her whole history in a dozen words.

"I have followed him and watched him ever since," she went on at length, in a quiet voice; "but a woman is so helpless. I suppose if any of us were watched and followed as he has been our lives would appear a strange mixture of a little good and much bad, mixed with a mass of neutral idleness. But surely his life is worse than the rest—not that it matters. Whatever his life had been, if he had been a living saint, Tony, he would have had to pay—for what he has done to me."

She looked steadily into the keen face that was watching hers. She was not in the least melodramatic, and what was stranger, perhaps, she was not ashamed. According to her lights, she was a

good woman, who went to church regularly, and did a little conventional good with her superfluous wealth. She obeyed the unwritten laws of society, and busied herself little in her neighbours' affairs. She was kind to her servants, and did not hate her neighbours more than is necessary in a crowded world. She led a blameless, unoccupied, and apparently purposeless life. And now she quietly told Tony Cornish that her life was not purposeless, but had for its aim the desire of an eye for an eye and a life for a life.

"You remember my husband," continued Mrs. Vansittart, after a pause. "He was always absorbed in his researches. He made a great discovery, and confided in Otto von Holzen, who thought that he could make a fortune out of it. But Von Holzen cheated and was caught. There was a great trial, and Von Holzen succeeded in incriminating my husband, who was innocent, instead of himself. The company, of course, failed, which meant ruin and dishonour. In a fit of despair my husband shot himself. And afterwards it transpired that by shooting himself at that time he saved my money. One cannot take proceedings against a dead man, it appears. So I was left a rich woman, after all, and my husband had frustrated Otto von Holzen. The world did not believe that my husband had done it on purpose; but I knew better. It is one of those beliefs that one keeps to one's self, and is indifferent whether the world

believes or not. So there remain but two things for me to do—the one is to enjoy the money, and to let my husband see that I spend it as he would have wished me to spend it—upon myself; the other is to make Otto von Holzen pay—when the time comes. Who knows? the Malgamite is perhaps the time; you are perhaps the man." She gave her disquieting little laugh again, and sat looking at him.

"I understand," he said at length. "Before I was puzzled. There seemed no reason why you should take any interest in the scheme."

"My interest in the Malgamite scheme narrows down to an interest in one person," answered Mrs. Vansittart, "which is what really happens to all human interests, my friend."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A COMPLICATION.

"La plus grande punition infligée à l'homme, c'est faire souffrir ce qu'il aime, en voulant frapper ce qu'il hait."

CORNISH had, as he told Mrs. Vansittart, been living a week at Scheveningen in one of the quiet little inns in the fishing-town, where a couple of apples are displayed before lace curtains in the window of the restaurant as a modest promise of entertainment within. Knowing no Dutch, he was saved the necessity of satisfying the curiosity of a garrulous landlady, who, after many futile questions which he understood perfectly, came to the conclusion that Cornish was in hiding, and might at any moment fall into the hands of the police.

There are, it appears, few human actions that attract more curiosity for a short time than the act of colonization. But no change is in the long run so apathetically accepted as the presence of a colony of aliens. Cornish soon learnt that the malgamite works were already accepted at Scheveningen as a fact of small local importance. One or two fish-sellers took their wares there instead of

going direct to the Hague. A few of the malgamite workers were seen at times, when they could get leave, on the Digue, or outside the smaller *cafés*. Inoffensive, stricken men these appeared to be, and the big-limbed, hardy fishermen looked on them with mingled contempt and pity. No one knew what the works were, and no one cared. Some thought that fireworks were manufactured within the high fence; others imagined it to be a gunpowder factory. All were content with the knowledge that the establishment belonged to an English company employing no outside labour.

Cornish spent his days unobtrusively walking on the dunes or writing letters in his modest rooms. His evenings he usually passed at the Café de l'Europe, where an occasional truant malgamite worker would indulge in a mild carouse. From these grim revellers Cornish elicited a good deal of information. He was not actually, as his landlady suspected, in hiding, but desired to withhold as long as possible from Von Holzen and Roden the fact that he was in Holland. None of the malgamite workers recognized him; indeed, he saw none of those whom he had brought across to the Hague, and he did not care to ask too many questions. At length, as we have seen, he arrived at the conclusion that Von Holzen's schemes had been too deeply laid to allow of attack by subtler means, and as a preliminary to further action called on Mrs. Vansittart.

The following morning he happened to take his walk within sight of the Villa des Dunes, although far enough away to avoid risk of recognition, and saw Percy Roden leave the house shortly after nine to proceed towards the works. Then Tony Cornish lighted a cigarette, and sat down to wait. He knew that Dorothy usually walked to the Hague before the heat of the day to do her shopping there and household business. He had not long to wait. Dorothy quitted the little house half an hour after her brother. But she did not go towards the Hague, turning to the right instead, across the open dunes towards the sea. It was a cool morning after many hot days, and a fresh, invigorating breeze swept over the sand hills from the sea. It was to be presumed that Dorothy, having leisure, was going to the edge of the sea for a breath of the brisk air there.

Cornish rose and followed her. He was essentially a practical man — among the leaders of a practical generation. The day, moreover, was conducive to practical thoughts and not to dreams, for it was grey and yet of a light air which came bowling in from a grey sea whose shores have assuredly been trodden by the most energetic of the races of the world. For all around the North Sea and on its bosom have risen races of men to conquer the universe again and again.

Cornish had come with the intention of seeing Dorothy and speaking with her. He had quite

clearly in his mind what he intended to say to her. It is not claimed for Tony Cornish that he had a great mind, and that this was now made up. But his thoughts, like all else about him, were neat and compact, wherein he had the advantage of cleverer men, who blundered along under the burden of vast ideas, which they could not put into portable shape, and over which they constantly stumbled.

He followed Dorothy, who walked briskly over the sand hills, upright, trim, and strong. She carried a stick, which she planted firmly enough in the sand as she walked. As he approached, he could see her lifting her head to look for the sea; for the highest hills are on the shore here, and stand in the form of a great barrier between the waves and the low-lying plains. She swung along at the pace which Mrs. Vansittart had envied her, without exertion, with that ease which only comes from perfect proportions and strength.

Cornish was quite close to her before she heard his step, and turned sharply. She recognized him at once, and he saw the colour slowly rise to her face. She gave no cry of surprise, however, was in no foolish feminine flutter, but came towards him quietly.

"I did not know you were in Holland," she said.

He shook hands without answering. All that he had prepared in his mind had suddenly vanished, leaving not a blank, but a hundred other things

which he had not intended to say, and which now, at the sight of her face, seemed inevitable.

"Yes," he said, looking into her steady grey eyes, "I am in Holland—because I cannot stay away—because I cannot live without you. I have pretended to myself and to everybody else that I come to the Hague because of the Malgamite; but it is not that. It is because you are here. Wherever you are I must be; wherever you go I must follow you. The world is not big enough for you to get away from me. It is so big that I feel I must always be near you—for fear something should happen to you—to watch over you and take care of you. You know what my life has been. . . ."

She turned away with a little shrug of the shoulders and a shake of the head. For a woman may read a man's life in his face—in the twinkling of an eye—as in an open book.

"All the world knows that . . ." he continued, with a sceptical laugh. "Is it not written . . . in the society papers? But it has always been aboveboard—and harmless enough. . . ."

Dorothy smiled as she looked out across the grey sea. He was, it appeared, telling her nothing that she did not know. For she was wise and shrewd—of that pure leaven of womankind which leaveneth all the rest. And she knew that a man must not be judged by his life—not even by outward appearance, upon which the world pins so much faith—but by that occasional glimpse of the soul

of him, which may live on, pure through all impurity, or may be foul beneath the whitest covering.

"Of course," he continued, "I have wasted my time horribly—I have never done any good in the world. But—great is the extenuating circumstance! I never knew what life was until I saw it . . . in your eyes."

Still she stood with her back half turned towards him, looking out across the sea. The sun had mastered the clouds and all the surface of the water glittered. A few boats on the horizon seemed to dream and sleep there. Beneath the dunes, the sand stretched away north and south in an unbroken plain. The wind whispered through the waving grass, and, far across the sands, the sea sang its eternal song. Dorothy and Cornish seemed to be alone in this world of sea and sand. So far as the eye could see, there were no signs of human life but the boats dreaming on the horizon.

"Are you quite sure?" said Dorothy, without turning her head.

"Of what . . .?"

"Of what you say."

"Yes; I am quite sure."

"Because," she said, with a little laugh that suddenly opened the gates of Paradise and bade one more poor human-being enter in—"because it is a serious matter . . . for me."

Then, because he was a practical man and knew

that happiness, like all else in this life, must be dealt with practically if aught is to be made of it, he told her why he had come. For happiness must not be rushed at and seized with wild eyes and grasping hands, but must be quickly taken when the chance offers, and delicately handled so that it be not ruined by overhaste or too much confidence. It is a gift that is rarely offered, and it is only fair to say that the majority of men and women are quite unfit to have it. Even a little prosperity (which is usually mistaken for happiness) often proves too much for the mental equilibrium, and one trembles to think what the recipient would do with real happiness.

"I did not come here intending to tell you that," said Cornish, after a pause.

They were seated now on the dry and driven sand, among the inequalities of the tufted grass.

Dorothy glanced at him gravely, for his voice had been grave.

"I think I knew," she answered, with a sort of quiet exultation. Happiness is the quietest of human states.

Cornish turned to look at her, and after a moment she met his eyes—for an instant only.

"I came to tell you a very different story," he said, "and one which at the moment seems to present insuperable difficulties. I can only show you that I care for you by bringing trouble into your life—which is not even original."

He broke off with a little, puzzled laugh. For he did not know how best to tell her that her brother was a scoundrel. He sat making idle holes in the sand with his stick.

"I am in a difficulty," he said at length—"so great a difficulty that there seems to be only one way out of it. You must forget what I have told you to-day, for I never meant to tell you until afterwards, if ever. Forget it for some months until the malgamite works have ceased to exist, and then, if I have the good fortune to be given an opportunity, I will"—he paused—"I will mention myself again," he concluded steadily.

Dorothy's lips quivered, but she said nothing. It seemed that she was content to accept his judgment without comment as superior to her own. For the wisest woman is she who suspects that men are wiser.

"It is quite clear," said Cornish, "that the Malgamite scheme is a fraud. It is worse than that; it is a murderous fraud. For Von Holzen's new system of making malgamite is not new at all, but an old system revived, which was set aside many years ago as too deadly. If it is not this identical system, it is a variation of it. They are producing the stuff for almost nothing at the cost of men's lives. In plain English, it is murder, and it must be stopped at any cost. You understand?"

"Yes."

"I must stop it whatever it may cost me."

"Yes," she answered again.

"I am going to the works to-night to have it out with Von Holzen and your brother. It is impossible to say how matters really stand—how much your brother knows, I mean—for Von Holzen is clever. He is a cold, calculating man, who rules all who come near him. Your brother has only to do with the money part of it. They are making a great fortune. I am told that financially it is splendidly managed. I am a duffer at such things, but I understand better now how it has all been done, and I see how clever it is. They produce the stuff for almost nothing, they sell it at a great price, and they have a monopoly. And the world thinks it is a charity. It is not; it is murder."

He spoke quietly, tapping the ground with his stick, and emphasizing his words with a deeper thrust into the sand. The habit of touching life lightly had become second nature with him, and even now he did not seem quite serious. He was, at all events, free from that deadly earnestness which blinds the eye to all save one side of a question. The very soil that he tapped could have risen up to speak in favour of such as he; for William the Silent, it is said, loved a jest, and never seemed to be quite serious during the long years of the greatest struggle the modern world has seen.

"It seems probable," went on Cornish, 'that your brother has been gradually drawn into it; that he did not know when he first joined Von

Holzen what the thing really was—the system of manufacture, I mean. As for the financial side of it, I am afraid he must have known of that all along; but the older one gets the less desirous one is of judging one's neighbour. In financial matters so much seems to depend, in the formation of a judgment, whether one is a loser or a gainer by the transaction. There is a great fortune in malgamite, and a fortune is a temptation to be avoided. Others besides your brother have been tempted. I should probably have succumbed myself if it had not been—for you."

She smiled again in a sort of derision, as if she could have told him more about himself than he could tell her. He saw the smile, and it brought a flash of light to his eyes. Deeper than fear of damnation, higher than the creeds, stronger than any motive in a man's life, is the absolute confidence placed in him by a woman.

"I went into the thing thoughtlessly," he continued, "because it was the fashion at the time to be concerned in some large charity. And I am not sorry. It was the luckiest move I ever made. And now the thing will have to be gone through with, and there will be trouble."

But he laughed as he spoke; for there was no trouble in their hearts, neither could anything appal them.

CHAPTER XIX.

DANGER.

"Beware equally of a sudden friend and a slow enemy."

RODEN and Von Holzen were at work in the little office of the malgamite works. The sun had just set, and the soft pearly twilight was creeping over the sand hills. The day's work was over, and the factories were all locked up for the night. In the stillness that seems to settle over earth and sea at sunset, the sound of the little waves could be heard —a distant, constant babbling from the west. The workers had gone to their huts. They were not a noisy body of men. It was their custom to creep quietly home when their work was done, and to sit in their doorways if the evening was warm, or with closed doors if the north wind was astir, and silently, steadily assuage their deadly thirst. Those who sought to harvest their days, who fondly imagined they were going to make a fight for it, drank milk according to advice handed down to them from their sickly forefathers. The others, more reckless, or wiser, perhaps, in their brief genera-

tion, took stronger drink to make glad their hearts and for their many infirmities. They had merely to ask, and that which they asked for was given to them without comment.

"Yes," said Uncle Ben to the new-comers, "you has a slap-up time—while it lasts."

For Uncle Ben was a strong man, and waxed garrulous in his cups. He had made malgamite all his life, and nothing would kill him, not even drink. Von Holzen watched Uncle Ben, and did not like him. It was Uncle Ben who played the concertina at the door of his hut in the evening. He sprang from the class whose soul takes delight in the music of a concertina, and rises on bank holidays to that height of gaiety which can only be expressed by an interchange of hats. He came from the slums of London, where they breed a race of men, small, ill-formed, disease-stricken, hard to kill.

The north wind was blowing this evening, and the huts were all closed. The sound of Uncle Ben's concertina could be dimly heard in what purported to be a popular air—a sort of nightmare of a tune such as a barrel-organist must suffer after bad beer. Otherwise, there was nothing stirring within the enclosure. There was, indeed, a hush over the whole place, such as Nature sometimes lays over certain spots like a quiet veil, as one might lay a cloth over the result of an accident, and say, "There is something wrong here; go away."

Cornish, having tried the main entrance gate,

found it locked, and no bell with which to summon those within. He went round to the northern end of the enclosure, where the sand had drifted against the high corrugated iron fencing, and where there were empty barrels on the inner side, as Uncle Ben had told him.

"After all, I am a managing director of this concern," said Cornish to himself, with a grim laugh, as he clambered over the fence.

He walked down the row of huts very slowly. Some of them were empty. The door of one stood ajar, and a sudden smell of disinfectant made him stop and look in. There was something lying on a bed covered by a grimy sheet.

"Um—m," muttered Cornish, and walked on.

There had been another visitor to the malgamite works that day. Then Cornish paused for a moment near Uncle Ben's hut, and listened to "Ta-ra-ra boom-de-ay." He bit his lips, restraining a sudden desire to laugh without any mirth in his heart, and went towards Von Holzen's office, where a light gleamed through the ill-closed curtains. For these men were working night and day now—making their fortunes. He caught, as he passed the window, a glimpse of Roden bending over a great ledger which lay open before him on the table, while Von Holzen, at another desk, was writing letters in his neat German hand.

Then Cornish went to the door, opened it, and passing in, closed it behind him.

"Good evening," he said, with just a slight exaggeration of his usual suave politeness.

"Halloa!" exclaimed Roden, with a startled look, and instinctively closing his ledger.

He looked hastily towards Von Holzen, who turned, pen in hand. Von Holzen bowed rather coldly.

"Good evening," he answered, without looking at Roden. Indeed, he crossed the room, and placed himself in front of his companion.

"Just come across?" inquired Roden, putting together his papers with his usual leisureliness.

"No; I have been here some time."

Cornish turned and met Von Holzen's eyes with a ready audacity. He was not afraid of this silent scientist, and had been trained in a social world where nerve and daring are highly cultivated. Von Holzen looked at him with a measuring eye, and remembered some warning words spoken by Roden months before. This was a cleverer man than they had thought him. This was the one mistake they had made in their careful scheme.

"I have been looking into things," said Cornish, in a final voice. He took off his hat and laid it aside.

Von Holzen went slowly back to his desk, which was a high one. He stood there close by Roden, leaning his elbow on the letters that he had been writing. The two men were thus together facing Cornish, who stood at the other side of the table.

"I have been looking into things," he repeated, "and—the game is up."

Roden, whose face was quite colourless, shrugged his shoulders with a sneering smile. Von Holzen slowly moistened his lips, and Cornish, meeting his glance, felt his heart leap upward to his throat. His way had been the way of peace. He had never seen that look in a man's eyes before, but there was no mistaking it. There are two things that none can mistake—an earthquake, and murder shining in a man's eyes. But there was good blood in Cornish's veins, and good blood never fails. His muscles tightened, and he smiled in Von Holzen's face.

"When you were over in London a fortnight ago," he said, "you saw my uncle, and squared him. But I am not Lord Ferriby, and I am not to be squared. As to the financial part of this business"—he paused, and glanced at the ledgers—"that seems to be of secondary importance at the moment. Besides, I do not understand finance."

Roden's tired eyes flickered at the way in which the word was spoken.

"I propose to deal with the more vital questions," Cornish continued, looking straight at Von Holzen. "I want details of the new process—the prescription, in fact."

"Then you want much," answered Von Holzen, with his slight accent.

"Oh, I want more than that," was the retort; "I want a list of your deaths—not necessarily

for publication. If the public were to hear of it, they would pull the place down about your ears, and probably hang you on your own water-tower."

Von Holzen laughed. "Ah, my fine gentleman, if there is any hanging up to be done, you are in it, too," he said. Then he broke into a good-humoured laugh, and waved the question aside with his hand. "But why should we quarrel? It is mere foolishness. We are not schoolboys, but men of the world, who are reasonable, I hope. I cannot give you the prescription because it is a trade secret. You would not understand it without expert assistance, and the expert would turn his knowledge to account. We chemists, you see, do not trust each other. No; but I can make malgamite here before your eyes—to show you that it is harmless—what?" He spoke easily, with a certain fascination of manner, as a man to whom speech was easy enough—who was perhaps silent with a set purpose—because silence is safe. "But it is a long process," he added, holding up one finger, "I warn you. It will take me two hours. And you, who have perhaps not dined, and this Roden, who is tired out——"

"Roden can go home—if he is tired," said Cornish.

"Well," answered Von Holzen, with outspread hands, "it is as you like. Will you have it now and here?"

"Yes—now and here."

Roden was slowly folding away his papers and closing his books. He glanced curiously at Von Holzen, as if he were displaying a hitherto unknown side to his character. Von Holzen, too, was collecting the papers scattered on his desk, with a patient air and a half-suppressed sigh of weariness, as if he were entering upon a work of supererogation.

"As to the deaths," he said, "I can demonstrate that as we go along. You will see where the dangers lie, and how criminally neglectful these people are. It is a curious thing, that carelessness of life. I am told the Russian soldiers have it."

It seemed that in his way Herr von Holzen was a philosopher, having in his mind a store of odd human items. He certainly had the power of arousing curiosity and making his hearers wish him to continue speaking, which is rare. Most men are uninteresting because they talk too much.

"Then I think I will go," said Roden, rising. He looked from one to the other, and received no answer. "Good night," he added, and walked to the door with dragging feet.

"Good night," said Cornish. And he was left alone for the first time in his life with Von Holzen, who was clearing the table and making his preparations with a silent deftness of touch acquired by the handling of delicate instruments, the mixing of dangerous drugs.

"Then our good friend Lord Ferriby does not know that you are here?" he inquired, without

much interest, as if acknowledging the necessity of conversation of some sort.

"No," answered Cornish.

"When I have shown you this experiment," pursued Von Holzen, setting the lamp on a side-table, "we must have a little talk about his lordship. With all modesty, you and I have the clearest heads of all concerned in this invention." He looked at Cornish with his sudden, pleasant smile. "You will excuse me," he said, "if while I am doing this I do not talk much. It is a difficult thing to keep in one's head, and all the attention is required in order to avoid a mistake or a mishap."

He had already assumed an air of unconscious command, which was probably habitual with him, as if there were no question between them as to who was the stronger man. Cornish sat, pleasantly silent and acquiescent, but he felt in no way dominated. It is one thing to assume authority, and another to possess it.

"I have a little laboratory in the factory where I usually work, but not at night. We do not allow lights in there. Excuse me, I will fetch my crucible and lamp."

And he went out, leaving Cornish alone. There was only one door to the room, leading straight out into the open. The office, it appeared, was built in the form of an annex to one of the storehouses, which stood detached from all other buildings.

In a few minutes Von Holzen returned, laden with bottles and jars. One large wicker-covered bottle with a screw top he set carefully on the table.

"I had to find them in the dark," he explained absent-mindedly, as if his thoughts were all absorbed by the work in hand. "And one must be careful not to jar or break any of these. Please do not touch them in my absence." As he spoke, he again examined the stoppers to see that all was secure. "I come again," he said, making sure that the large basket-covered bottle was safe. Then he walked quickly out of the room and closed the door behind him.

Almost immediately Cornish was conscious of a bitter taste in his mouth, though he could smell nothing. The lamp suddenly burnt blue and instantly went out. Cornish stood up, groping in the dark, his head swimming, a deadly numbness dragging at his limbs. He had no pain, only a strange sensation of being drawn upwards. Then his head bumped against the door, and the remaining glimmer of consciousness shaped itself into the knowledge that this was death. He seemed to swing backwards and forwards between life and death —between sleep and consciousness. Then he felt a cooler air on his lips. He had fallen against the door, which did not fit against the threshold, and a draught of fresh air whistled through upon his face. "Carbonic acid gas," he muttered, with shaking lips. "Carbonic acid gas." He repeated the words over

and over again, as a man in delirium repeats that which has fixed itself in his wandering brain. Then, with a great effort, he brought himself to understand the meaning of the words that one portion of his brain kept repeating to the other portion which could not comprehend them. He tried to recollect all that he knew of carbonic acid gas, which was, in fact, not much. He vaguely remembered that it is not an active gas that mingles with the air and spreads, but rather it lurks in corners—an invisible form of death—and will so lurk for years unless disturbed by a current of air.

Cornish knew that in falling he had fallen out of the radius of the escaping gas, which probably filled the upper part of the room. If he raised himself, he would raise himself into the gas, which was slowly descending upon him, and that would mean instant death. He had already inhaled enough—perhaps too much. He lay quite still, breathing the draught between the door and the threshold, and raising his left hand, felt for the handle of the door. He found it and turned it. The door was locked. He lay still, and his brain began to wander, but with an effort he kept a hold upon his thoughts. He was a strong man, who had never had a bad illness—a cool head and an intrepid heart. Stretching out his legs, he found some object close to him. It was Von Holzen's desk, which stood on four strong legs against the wall. Cornish, who was quick and observant, remembered now how the

room was shaped and furnished. He gathered himself together, drew in his legs, and doubled himself, with his feet against the desk, his shoulder against the door. He was long and lithe, of a steely strength which he had never tried. He now slowly straightened himself, and tore the screws out of the solid wood of the door, which remained hanging by the upper hinge. His head and shoulders were now out in the open air.

He lay for a moment or two to regain his breath, and recover from the deadly nausea that follows gas poisoning. Then he rose to his feet, and stood swaying like a drunken man. Von Holzen's cottage was a few yards away. A light was burning there, and gleamed through the cracks of the curtains.

Cornish went towards the cottage, then paused. "No," he muttered, holding his head with both hands. "It will keep." And he staggered away in the darkness towards the corner where the empty barrels stood against the fence.

CHAPTER XX.

FROM THE PAST.

"One and one with a shadowy third."

"You have the air, *mon ami*, of a malgamiter," said Mrs. Vansittart, looking into Cornish's face—"lurking here in your little inn in a back street! Why do you not go to one of the larger hotels in Scheveningen, since you have abandoned the Hague?"

"Because the larger hotels are not open yet," replied Cornish, bringing forward a chair.

"That is true, now that I think of it. But I did not ask the question wanting an answer. You, who have been in the world, should know women better than to think that. I asked in idleness—a woman's trick. Yes; you have been or you are ill. There is a white look in your face."

She sat looking at him. She had walked all the way from Park Straat in the shade of the trees—quite a pedestrian feat for one who confessed to belonging to a carriage generation. She had boldly entered the restaurant of the little hotel, and had told the waiter to take her to Mr. Cornish's apartment.

"It hardly matters what a very young waiter, at the beginning of his career, may think of us. But downstairs they are rather scandalized, I warn you," she said.

"Oh, I ceased explaining many years ago," replied Cornish, "even in English. More suspicion is aroused by explanation than by silence. For this wise world will not believe that one is telling the truth."

"When one is not," suggested Mrs. Vansittart.

"When one is not," admitted Cornish, in rather a tired voice, which, to so keen an ear as that of his hearer, was as good as asking her why she had come.

She laughed. "Yes," she said, "you are not inclined to sit and talk nonsense at this time in the morning. No more am I. I did not walk from Park Straat and take your defences by storm, and subject myself to the insult of a raised eyebrow on the countenance of a foolish young waiter, to talk nonsense even with you, who are cleverer with your non-committing platitudes than any man I know." She laughed rather harshly, as many do when they find themselves suddenly within hail, as it were, of that weakness which is called feeling. "No, I came here on—let us say—business. I hold a good card, and I am going to play it. I want you to hold your hand in the meantime; give me to-day, you understand. I have taken great care to strengthen my hand. This is no sudden impulse,

but a set purpose to which I have led up for some weeks. It is not scrupulous ; it is not even honest. It is, in a word, essentially feminine, and not an affair to which you as a man could lend a moment's approval. Therefore, I tell you nothing. I merely ask you to leave me an open field to-day. Our end is the same, though our methods and our purpose differ as much as—well, as much as our minds. You want to break this Malgamite corner. I want to break Otto von Holzen. You understand ? "

Cornish had known her long enough to permit himself to nod and say nothing.

" If I succeed, *tant mieux*. If I fail, it is no concern of yours, and it will in no way affect you or your plans. Ah, you disapprove, I see. What a complicated world this would be if we could all wear masks ! Your face used to be a safer one than it is now. Can it be that you are becoming serious—*un jeune homme sérieux ?* Heaven save you from that ! "

" No ; I have a headache ; that is all," laughed Cornish.

Mrs. Vansittart was slowly unbuttoning and rebuttoning her glove, deep in thought. For some women can think deeply and talk superficially at the same moment.

" Do you know," she said, with a sudden change of voice and manner, " I have a conviction that you know something to-day of which you were ignorant

yesterday? All knowledge, I suppose, leaves its mark. Something about Otto von Holzen, I suspect. Ah, Tony, if you know something, tell it to me. If you hold a strong card, let me play it. You do not know how I have longed and waited—what a miserable little hand I hold against this strong man."

She was serious enough now. Her voice had a ring of hopelessness in it, as if she knew that limit against which a woman is fated to throw herself when she tries to injure a man who has no love for her. If the love be there, then is she strong, indeed; but without it, what can she do? It is the little more that is so much, and the little less that is such worlds away.

Cornish did not deny the knowledge which she ascribed to him, but merely shook his head, and Mrs. Vansittart suddenly changed her manner again. She was quick and clever enough to know that whatever account stood open between Cornish and Von Holzen the reckoning must be between them alone, without the help of any woman.

"Then you will remain indoors," she said, rising, "and recover from your . . . strange headache—and not go near the malgamite works, nor see Percy Roden or Otto von Holzen—and let me have my little try—that is all I ask."

"Yes," answered Cornish, reluctantly; "but I think you would be wiser to leave Von Holzen to me."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Vansittart, with one of her quick glances. "You think that."

She paused on the threshold, then shrugged her shoulders and passed out. She hurried home, and there wrote a note to Percy Roden.

"DEAR MR. RODEN,

"It seems a long time since I saw you last, though perhaps it only seems so to *me*. I shall be at home at five o'clock this evening, if you care to take pity on a lonely countrywoman. If I should be out riding when you come, please await my return.

"Yours very truly,

"EDITH VANSITTART."

She closed the letter with a little cruel smile, and despatched it by the hand of a servant. Quite early in the afternoon she put on her habit, but did not go straight downstairs, although her horse was at the door. She went to the library instead—a small, large-windowed room, looking on to Oranje Straat. From a drawer in her writing-table she took a key, and examined it closely before slipping it into her pocket. It was a new key with the file-marks still upon it.

"A clumsy expedient," she said. "But the end is so desirable that the means must not be too scrupulously considered."

She rode down Kazerne Straat and through the

wood by the Leyden Road. By turning to the left, she soon made her way to the East Dunes, and thus describing a circle, rode slowly back towards Scheveningen. She knew her way, it appeared, to the malgamite works. Leaving her horse in the care of the groom, she walked to the gate of the works, which was opened to her by the doorkeeper, after some hesitation. The man was a German, and therefore, perhaps, more amenable to Mrs. Vansittart's imperious arguments.

"I must see Herr von Holzen without delay," she said. "Show me his office."

The man pointed out the building. "But the Herr Professor is in the factory," he said. "It is mixing-day to-day. I will, however, fetch him."

Mrs. Vansittart walked slowly towards the office where Roden had told her that the safe stood wherein the prescription and other papers were secured. She knew it was mixing-day and that Von Holzen would be in the factory. She had sent Roden on a fool's errand to Park Straat to await her return there. Was she going to succeed? Would she be left alone for a few moments in that little office with the safe? She fingered the key in her pocket—a duplicate obtained at some risk, with infinite difficulty, by the simple stratagem of borrowing Roden's keys to open an old and disused desk one evening in Park Straat. She had conceived the plan herself, had carried it out herself, as all must who wish to succeed in a human design. She was quite aware that the plan

was crude and almost childish, but the gain was great, and it is often the simplest means that succeed. The secret of the manufacture of malgamite—written in black and white—might prove to be Von Holzen's death-warrant. Mrs. Vansittart had to fight in her own way or not fight at all. She could not understand the slower, surer methods of Mr. Wade and Cornish, who appeared to be waiting and wasting time.

The German doorkeeper accompanied her to the office, and opened the door after knocking and receiving no answer.

"Will the high-born take a seat?" he said; "I shall not be long."

"There is no need to hurry," said Mrs. Vansittart to herself.

And before the door was quite closed she was on her feet again. The office was bare and orderly. Even the waste-paper baskets were empty. The books were locked away and the desks were clear. But the small green safe stood in the corner. Mrs. Vansittart went towards it, key in hand. The key was the right one. It had only been selected by guesswork among a number on Roden's bunch. It slipped into the lock and turned smoothly, but the door would not move. She tugged and wrenched at the handle, then turned it accidentally, and the heavy door swung open. There were two drawers at the bottom of the safe which were not locked, and contained neatly folded papers. Her fingers were among

these in a moment. The papers were folded and tied together. Many of the bundles were labelled. A long narrow envelope lay at the bottom of the drawer. She seized it quickly and turned it over. It bore no address nor any superscription. "Ah!" she said breathlessly, and slipped her finger within the flap of the envelope. Then she hesitated for a moment, and turned on her heel. Von Holzen was standing in the doorway looking at her.

They stared at each other for a moment in silence. Mrs. Vansittart's lips were drawn back, showing her even, white teeth. Von Holzen's quiet eyes were wide open, so that the white showed all around the dark pupil. Then he sprang at her without a word. She was a lithe, strong woman, taller than he, or else she would have fallen. Instead, she stood her ground, and he, failing to get a grasp at her wrist, stumbled sideways against the table. In a moment she had run round it, and again they stared at each other, without a word, across the table where Percy Roden kept the books of the malgamite works.

A slow smile came to Von Holzen's face, which was colourless always, and now a sort of grey. He turned on his heel, walked to the door, and, locking it, slipped the key into his pocket. Then he returned to Mrs. Vansittart. Neither spoke. No explanation was at that moment necessary. He lifted the table bodily, and set it aside against the wall. Then he went slowly towards her, holding

out his hand for the unaddressed envelope, which she held behind her back. He stood for a moment holding out his hand while his strong will went out to meet hers. Then he sprang at her again and seized her two wrists. The strength of his arms was enormous, for he was a deep-chested man, and had been a gymnast. The struggle was a short one, and Mrs. Vansittart dropped the envelope helplessly from her paralyzed fingers. He picked it up.

"You are the wife of Karl Vansittart," he said in German.

"I am his widow," she replied; and her breath caught, for she was still shaken by the physical and moral realization of her absolute helplessness in his hands, and she saw in a flash of thought the question in his mind as to whether he could afford to let her leave the room alive.

"Give me the key with which you opened the safe," he said coldly.

She had replaced the key in her pocket, and now sought it with a shaking hand. She gave it to him without a word. Morally she would not acknowledge herself beaten, and the bitterness of that moment was the self-contempt with which she realized a physical cowardice which she had hitherto deemed quite impossible. For the flesh is always surprised by its own weakness.

Von Holzen looked at the key critically, turning it over in order to examine the workman-

ship. It was clumsily enough made, and he doubtless guessed how she had obtained it. Then he glanced at her as she stood breathless with a colourless face and compressed lips.

"I hope I did not hurt you," he said quietly, thereby putting in a dim and far-off claim to greatness, for it is hard not to triumph in absolute victory.

She shook her head with a twisted smile, and looked down at her hands, which were still helpless. There were bands of bright red round the white wrists. Her gloves lay on the table. She went towards them and numbly took them up. He was impassive still, and his face, which had flushed a few moments earlier, slowly regained its usual calm pallor. It was this very calmness, perhaps, that suddenly incensed Mrs. Vansittart. Or it may have been that she had regained her courage.

"Yes," she cried, with a sort of break in her voice that made it strident—"yes. I am Karl Vansittart's wife, and I—cared for him. Do you know what that means? But you can't. All that side of life is a closed book to such as you. It means that if you had been a hundred times in the right and he always in the wrong, I should still have believed in him and distrusted you—should still have cared for him and hated you. But he was not guilty. He was in the right and you were wrong—a thief and a murderer, no doubt. And to screen

your paltry name, you sacrificed Karl and the happiness of two people who had just begun to be happy. It means that I shall not rest until I have made you pay for what you have done. I have never lost sight of you—and never shall——"

She paused, and looked at his impassive face with a strange, dull curiosity as she spoke of the future, as if wondering whether she had a future or had reached the end of her life—here, at this moment, in the little plank-walled office of the malgamite works. But her courage rose steadily. It is only afar off that Death is terrible. When we actually stand in his presence, we usually hold up our heads and face him quietly enough.

"You may have other enemies," she continued. "I know you have—men, too—but none of them will last so long as I shall, none of them is to be feared as I am——"

She stopped again in a fury, for he was obviously waiting for her to pause for mere want of breath, as if her words could be of no weight.

"If you fear anything on earth," she said, acknowledging his one merit despite herself.

"I fear you so little," he answered, going to the door and unlocking it, "that you may go."

Her whip lay on the table. He picked it up and handed it to her, gravely, without a bow, without a shade of triumph or the smallest suspicion of sarcasm. There was perhaps the nucleus of a great man in Otto von Holzen, after all, for

there was no smallness in his mind. He opened the door, and stood aside for her to pass out.

"It is not because you do not fear me—that you let me go," said Mrs. Vansittart. "But—because you are afraid of Tony Cornish."

And she went out, wondering whether the shot had told or missed.

CHAPTER XXI.

A COMBINED FORCE.

"Hear, but be faithful to your interest still.
Secure your heart, then fool with whom you will."

MRS. VANSITTART walked to the gate of the malgamite works, thinking that Von Holzen was following her on the noiseless sand. At the gate, which the porter threw open on seeing her approach, she turned and found that she was alone. Von Holzen was walking quietly back towards the factory. He was so busy making his fortune that he could not give Mrs. Vansittart more than a few minutes. She bit her lip as she went towards her horse. Neglect is no balm to the wounds of the defeated.

She mounted her horse and looked at her watch. It was nearly five o'clock, and Percy Roden was doubtless waiting for her in Park Straat. It is a woman's business to know what is expected of her. Mrs. Vansittart recalled in a very matter-of-fact way the wording of her letter to Roden. She brushed some dust from her habit, and made sure that her hair was tidy. Then she fell into deep thought, and set her mind in a like order for the

work that lay before her. A man's deepest schemes in love are child's play beside the woman's schemes that meet or frustrate his own. Mrs. Vansittart rode rapidly home to Park Straat.

Mr. Roden, the servant told her, was awaiting her return in the drawing-room. She walked slowly upstairs. Some victories are only to be won with arms that hurt the bearer. Mrs. Vansittart's mind was warped, or she must have known that she was going to pay too dearly for her revenge. She was sacrificing invaluable memories to a paltry hatred.

"Ah!" she said to Roden, whose manner betrayed the recollection of her invitation to him, "so I have kept you waiting—a minute, perhaps, for each day that you have stayed away from Park Straat."

Roden laughed, with a shade of embarrassment, which she was quick to detect.

"Is it your sister," she asked, "who has induced you to stay away?"

"Dorothy has nothing but good to say of you," he answered.

"Then it is Herr von Holzen," said Mrs. Vansittart, laying aside her gloves and turning towards the tea-table. She spoke quietly and rather indifferently, as one does of persons who are removed by a social grade. "I have never told you, I believe, that I happen to know something of your —what is he?—your foreman. He has probably warned you against me. My husband once em-

ployed this Von Holzen, and was, I believe, robbed by him. We never knew the man socially, and I have always suspected that he bore us some ill feeling on that account. You remember—in this room, when you brought him to call soon after your works were built—that he referred to having met my husband. Doubtless with a view to finding out how much I knew, or if I was in reality the wife of Charles Vansittart. But I did not choose to enlighten him."

She had poured out tea while she spoke. Her hands were unsteady still, and she drew down the sleeve of her habit to hide the discoloration of her wrist. She turned rather suddenly, and saw on Roden's face the confession that it had been due to Von Holzen's influence that he had absented himself from her drawing-room.

"However," she said, with a little laugh, and in a final voice, as if dismissing a subject of small importance—"however, I suppose Herr von Holzen is rising in the world, and has the sensitive vanity of persons in that trying condition."

She sat down slowly, remembering her pretty figure in its smart habit. Roden's slow eyes noted the pretty figure also, which she observed, one may be sure.

"Tell me your news," she said. "You look tired and ill. It is hard work making one's fortune. Be sure that you know what you want to buy before you make it, or afterwards you may find that it

has not been worth while to have worked so hard."

"Perhaps what I want is not to be bought," he said, with his eyes on the carpet. For he was an awkward player at this light game.

"Ah!" she exclaimed. "Then it must be either worthless or priceless."

He looked at her, but he did not speak, and those who are quick to detect the fleeting shade of pathos might have seen it in the glance of the tired eyes. For Percy Roden was only clever as a financier, and women have no use for such cleverness, only for the results of it. Roden was conscious of making no progress with Mrs. Vansittart, who handled him as a cat handles a disabled mouse while watching another hole.

"You have been busier than ever, I suppose," she said, "since you have had no time to remember your friends."

"Yes," answered Roden, brightening. He was so absorbed in the most absorbing and lasting employment of which the human understanding is capable that he could talk of little else, even to Mrs. Vansittart. "Yes, we have been very busy, and are turning out nearly ten tons a day now. And we have had trouble from a quarter in which we did not expect it. Von Holzen has been much worried, I know, though he never says anything. He may not be a gentleman, Mrs. Vansittart, but he is a wonderful man."

"Ah," said Mrs. Vansittart, indifferently; and something in her manner made him all the more desirous of explaining his reasons for associating himself with a person who, as she had subtly and flatteringly hinted more than once, was far beneath him from a social point of view. This desire rendered him less guarded than it was perhaps wise to be under the circumstances.

"Yes, he is a very clever man—a genius, I think. He rises to each difficulty without any effort, and every day shows me new evidence of his foresight. He has done more than you think in the malgamite works. His share of the work has been greater than anybody knows. I am only the financier, you understand. I know about book-keeping and about—money—how it should be handled—that is all."

"You are too modest, I think," said Mrs. Vansittart, gravely. "You forget that the scheme was yours; you forget all that you did in London."

"Yes—while Von Holzen was doing more here. He had the more difficult task to perform. Of course I did my share in getting the thing up. It would be foolish to deny that. I suppose I have a head on my shoulders, like other people." And Mr. Percy Roden, with his hand at his moustache, smiled a somewhat fatuous smile. He thought, perhaps, that a woman will love a man the more for being a good man of business.

"Yes," said Mrs. Vansittart, softly.

"But I should like Von Holzen to have his due," said Roden, rather grandly. "He has done wonders, and no one quite realizes that except perhaps Cornish."

"Indeed! Does Mr. Cornish give Herr von Holzen his due, then?"

"Cornish does his best to upset Von Holzen's plans at every turn. He does not understand business at all. When that sort of man goes into business he invariably gets into trouble. He has what I suppose he calls scruples. It comes, I imagine, from not having been brought up to it." Roden spoke rather hotly. He was of a jealous disposition, and disliked Mrs. Vansittart's attitude towards Cornish. "But he is no match for Von Holzen," he continued, "as he will find to his cost. Von Holzen is not the sort of man to stand any kind of interference."

"Ah?" said Mrs. Vansittart again, in the slightly questioning and indifferent manner with which she received all defence of Otto von Holzen, and which had the effect of urging Roden to further explanation.

"He is not a man I should care to cross myself," he said, determined to secure Mrs. Vansittart's full attention. "He has the whole of the malgamiters at his beck and call, and is pretty powerful, I can tell you. They are a desperate set of fellows; men engaged in a dangerous industry do not wear kid gloves."

Mrs. Vansittart was watching him across the low

tea-table; for Roden rarely looked at his interlocutor. He had more of her attention than he perhaps suspected.

"Ah," she said, rather more indifferently than before, "I think you exaggerate Herr von Holzen's importance in the world."

"I do not exaggerate the danger into which Cornish will run if he is not careful," retorted Roden, half sullenly.

There was a ring of anxiety in his voice. Mrs. Vansittart glanced sharply at him. It was borne in upon her that Roden himself was afraid of Von Holzen. This was more serious than it had at first appeared. There are periods in every man's history when human affairs suddenly appear to become unmanageable and the course of events gets beyond any sort of control—when the hand at the helm falters, and even the managing female of the family hesitates to act. Roden seemed to have reached such a crisis now, and Mrs. Vansittart, charm she never so wisely, could not brush the frown of anxiety from his brow. He was in no mood for love-making, and men cannot call up this fleeting humour, as a woman can, when it is wanted. So they sat and talked of many things, both glancing at the clock with a surreptitious eye. They were not the first man and woman to go hunting Cupid with the best will in the world—only to draw a blank.

At length Roden rose from his chair with slow,

lazy movements. Physically and morally he seemed to want tightening up.

"I must go back to the works," he said. "We work late to-night."

"Then do not tell Herr von Holzen where you have been," replied Mrs. Vansittart, with a warning smile. Then, on the threshold, with a gravity and a glance that sent him away happy, she added, "I do not want you to discuss me with Otto von Holzen, you understand!"

She stood with her hand on the bell, looking at the clock, while he went downstairs. The moment she heard the street door closed behind him she rang sharply.

"The brougham," she said to the servant, "at once."

Ten minutes later she was rattling down Maurits Kade towards the Villa des Dunes. A deep bank of clouds had risen from the west, completely obscuring the sun, so that it seemed already to be twilight. Indeed nature itself appeared to be deceived, and as the carriage left the town behind and emerged into the sandy quiet of the suburbs, the countless sparrows in the lime-trees were preparing for the night. The trees themselves were shedding an evening odour, while, from canal and dyke and ditch, there arose that subtle smell of damp weed and grass which hangs over the whole of Holland all night.

"The place smells of calamity," said Mrs. Van-

sittart to herself, as she quitted the carriage and walked quickly along the sandy path to the Villa des Dunes.

Dorothy was in the garden, and, seeing her, came to the gate. Mrs. Vansittart had changed her riding-habit for one of the dark silks she usually wore, but she had forgotten to put on any gloves.

"Come," she said rapidly, taking Dorothy's hand, and holding it—"come to the seat at the end of the garden where we sat one evening when we dined alone together. I do not want to go indoors. I am nervous, I suppose. I have allowed myself to give way to panic like a child in the dark. I felt lonely in Park Straat, with a house full of servants, so I came to you."

"I think there is going to be a thunderstorm," said Dorothy.

And Mrs. Vansittart broke into a sudden laugh. "I knew you would say that. Because you are modern and practical—or, at all events, you show a practical face to the world, which is better. Yes, one may say that much for the modern girl, at all events—she keeps her head. As to her heart—well, perhaps she has not got one."

"Perhaps not," admitted Dorothy.

They had reached the seat now, and sat down beneath the branches of a weeping-willow, trimly trained in the accurate Dutch fashion. Mrs. Vansittart glanced at her companion, and gave a little, low, wise laugh.

"I did well to come to you," she said, "for you have not many words. You have a sense of humour —that saving sense which so few people possess— and I suspect you to be a person of action. I came in a panic, which is still there, but in a modified degree. One is always more nervous for one's friends than for one's self. Is it not so? It is for Tony Cornish that I fear."

Dorothy looked steadily straight in front of her, and there was a short silence.

"I do not know why he stays in Holland, and I wish he would go home," continued Mrs. Vansittart. "It is unreasoning, I know, and foolish, but I am convinced that he is running into danger." She stopped suddenly, and laid her hand upon Dorothy's; for she had caught many foreign ways and gestures. "Listen," she said, in a lower tone. "It is useless for you and me to mince matters. The Malgamite scheme is a terrible crime, and Tony Cornish means to stop it. Surely you and I have long suspected that. I know Otto von Holzen. He killed my husband. He is a most dangerous man. He is attempting to frighten Tony Cornish away from here, and he does not understand the sort of person he is dealing with. One does not frighten persons of the stamp of Tony Cornish, whether man or woman. I have made Tony promise not to leave his rooms to-day. For to-morrow I cannot answer. You understand?"

"Yes," answered Dorothy, with a sudden light in her eyes, "I understand."

"Your brother must take care of himself. I care nothing for Lord Ferriby, or any others concerned in this, but only for Tony Cornish, for whom I have an affection, for he was part of my past life—when I was happy. As for the malgamiters, they and their works may—go hang!" And Mrs. Vansittart snapped her fingers. "Do you know Major White?" she asked suddenly.

"Yes; I have seen him once."

"So have I—only once. But for a woman once is often enough—is it not so?—to enable one to judge. I wish we had him here."

"He is coming," answered Dorothy. "I think he is coming to-morrow. When I saw Mr. Cornish yesterday, he told me that he expected him. I believe he wrote for him to come. He also wrote to Mr. Wade, the banker, asking him to come."

"Then he found things worse than he expected. He has, in a sense, sent for reinforcements. When does Major White arrive—in the morning?"

"No; not till the evening."

"Then he comes by Flushing," said Mrs. Vansittart, practically. "You are thinking of something. What is it?"

"I was wondering how I could see some of the malgamite workers to-morrow. I know some of them, and it is from them that the danger may be expected. They are easily led, and Herr von Holzen would not scruple to make use of them."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Vansittart, "you have guessed

that, too. I have more than guessed it—I know it. You must see these men to-morrow."

"I will," answered Dorothy, simply.

Mrs. Vansittart rose and held out her hand. "Yes," she said, "I came to the right person. You are calm, and keep your head; as to the other, perhaps that is in safe keeping too. Good night, and come to lunch with me to-morrow."

CHAPTER XXII.

GRATITUDE.

"On se guérit de la bienfaisance par la connaissance de ceux qu'on oblige."

"CAN you tell me if there is a moon to-night?" Mrs. Vansittart asked a porter in the railway station at the Hague.

The man stared at her for a moment, then realized that the question was a serious one.

"I will ask one of the engine-drivers, my lady," he answered, with his hand at the peak of his cap.

It was past nine o'clock, and Mrs. Vansittart had been waiting nearly half an hour for the Flushing train. Her carriage was walking slowly up and down beneath the glass roof of the entrance to the railway station. She had taken a ticket in order to gain access to the platform, and was almost alone there with the porters. Her glance travelled backwards and forwards between the clock and the western sky, visible beneath the great arch of the station. The evening was a clear one, for the month of June still lingered, but the twilight was

at hand. The Flushing train was late to-night of all nights; and Mrs. Vansittart stamped her foot with impatience. What was worse was Dorothy Roden's lateness. Dorothy and Mrs. Vansittart, like two generals on the eve of a battle, had been exchanging hurried notes all day; and Dorothy had promised to meet Mrs. Vansittart at the station on the arrival of the train.

"The moon is rising now, my lady—a half-moon," said the porter, approaching with that leisureliness which characterizes railway porters between trains.

"Why does your stupid train not come?" asked Mrs. Vansittart, with unreasoning anger.

"It has been signalled, my lady; a few minutes now."

Mrs. Vansittart gave a quick sigh of relief, and turned on her heel. She had long been unable to remain quietly in one place. She saw Dorothy coming up the slope to the platform. At last matters were taking a turn for the better—except, indeed, Dorothy's face, which was set and white.

"I have found out something," she said at once, and speaking quickly but steadily. "It is for to-night, between half-past nine and ten."

She had her watch in her hand, and compared it quickly with the station clock as she spoke.

"I have secured Uncle Ben," she said—all the ridicule of the name seemed to have vanished long ago. "He is drunk, and therefore cunning. It is only when he is sober that he is stupid. I have him

in a cab downstairs, and have told your man to watch him. I have been to Mr. Cornish's rooms again, and he has not come in. He has not been in since morning, and they do not know where he is. No one knows where he is."

Dorothy's lips quivered for a moment, and she held it with her teeth. Mrs. Vansittart touched her arm lightly with her gloved fingers—a strange, quick, woman's gesture.

"I went upstairs to his rooms," continued Dorothy. "It is no good thinking of etiquette now, or pretending——"

"No," said Mrs. Vansittart, hurriedly, so that the sentence was never finished.

"I found nothing except two torn envelopes in the waste-paper basket. One in an uneducated hand—perhaps feigned. The other was Otto von Holzen's writing."

"Ah! In Otto von Holzen's writing—addressed to Tony at the Zwaan at Scheveningen?"

"Yes."

"Then Otto von Holzen knows where Tony is staying, at all events. We have learnt something. You have kept the envelopes?"

"Yes."

They both turned at the rumble of the train outside the station. The great engine came clanking in over the points, its lamp glaring like the eye of some monster.

"Provided Major White is in the train," mut-

tered Mrs. Vansittart, tapping on the pavement with her foot. "If he is not in the train, Dorothy?"

"Then we must go alone."

Mrs. Vansittart turned and looked her slowly up and down.

"You are a brave woman," she said thoughtfully.

But Major White was in the train, being a man of his word in small things as well as in great. They saw him pushing his way patiently through the crowd of hotel porters and others who had advice or their services to offer him. Then he saw Mrs. Vansittart and Dorothy, and recognized them.

"Give your luggage ticket to the hotel porter and let him take it straight to the hotel. You are wanted elsewhere."

Still Major White was only in his normal condition of mild and patient surprise. He had only met Mrs. Vansittart once, and Dorothy as often. He did exactly as he was told without asking one of those hundred questions which would inevitably have been asked by many men and more women under such circumstances, and followed the ladies out of the crowd.

"We must talk here," said Mrs. Vansittart. "One cannot do so in a carriage in the streets of the Hague."

Major White bowed gravely, and looked from one to the other. He was rather travel-worn, and seemed to be feeling the heat.

"Tony Cornish has probably written to you

about his discoveries as to the malgamite works. We have no time to go into that question, however," said Mrs. Vansittart, who was already beginning to be impatient with this placid man. "He has earned the enmity of Otto von Holzen—a man who will stop at nothing—and the malgamiters are being raised against him by Von Holzen. Our information is very vague, but we are almost certain that an attempt is to be made on Tony's life to-night between half-past nine and ten. You understand?" Mrs. Vansittart almost stamped her foot.

"Oh yes," answered White, looking at the station clock. "Twenty minutes' time."

"We have the information from one of the malgamiters themselves, who knows the time and the place, but he is tipsy. He is in a carriage outside the station."

"How tipsy?" asked Major White; and both his hearers shrugged their shoulders.

"How can we tell you that?" snapped Mrs. Vansittart; and Major White dropped his glass from his eye.

"Where is your brother?" he said, turning to Dorothy. He was evidently rather afraid of Mrs. Vansittart, as a quick-spoken person not likely to have patience with a slow man.

"He has gone to Utrecht," answered Dorothy. "And Mr. von Holzen is not at the works, which are locked up. I have just come from there. By

a lucky chance I met this man Ben, and have brought him here."

White looked at Dorothy thoughtfully, and something in his gaze made her change colour.

"Let me see this man," he said, moving towards the exit.

"He is in that carriage," said Dorothy, when they had reached a quiet corner of the station yard. "You must be quick. We have only a quarter of an hour now. He is an Englishman."

White got into the cab with Uncle Ben, who appeared to be sleeping, and closed the door after him. In a few moments he emerged again.

"Tell the man to drive to a chemist's," he said to Mrs. Vansittart. "The fellow is not so bad. I have got something out of him, and will get more. Follow in your carriage—you and Miss Roden."

It was Major White's turn now to take the lead, and Mrs. Vansittart meekly obeyed, though White's movements were so leisurely as to madden her.

At the chemist's shop, White descended from the carriage and appeared to have some language in common with the druggist, for he presently returned to the carriage, carrying a tumbler. After a moment he went to the window of Mrs. Vansittart's neat brougham.

"I must bring him in here," he said. "You have a pair of horses which look as if they could go. Tell your man to drive to the pumping-station on the Dunes, wherever that may be."

Then he went and fetched Uncle Ben, whom he brought by one arm, in a dislocated condition, trotting feebly to keep pace with the major's long stride.

Mrs. Vansittart's coachman must have received very decided orders, for he skirted the town at a rattling trot, and soon emerged from the streets into the quiet of the Wood, which was dark and deserted. Here, in a sandy and lonely alley, he put the horses to a gallop. The carriage swayed and bumped. Those inside exchanged no words. From time to time Major White shook Uncle Ben, which seemed to be a part of his strenuous treatment.

At length the carriage stopped on the narrow road, paved with the little bricks they make at Gouda, that leads from Scheveningen to the pumping-station on the Dunes. Major White was the first to quit it, dragging Uncle Ben unceremoniously after him. Then, with his disengaged hand, he helped the ladies. He screwed his glass tightly into his eye, and looked round him with a measuring glance.

"This place will be as light as day," he said, "when the moon rises from behind those trees."

He drew Uncle Ben aside, and talked with him for some time in a low voice. The man was almost sober now, but so weak that he could not stand without assistance. Major White was an advocate, it seemed, of heroic measures. He appeared to be asking many questions, for Uncle Ben pointed from time to time with an unsteady hand into the

darkness. When his mind, muddled with malgamite and drink, failed to rise to the occasion, Major White shook him like a sack. After a few minutes' conversation, Ben broke down completely, and sat against a sand-bank to weep. Major White left him there, and went towards the ladies.

"Will you tell your man," he said to Mrs. Vansittart, "to drive back to the junction of the two roads and wait there under the trees?" He paused, looking dubiously from one to the other. "And you and Miss Roden had better go back with him and stay in the carriage."

"No," said Dorothy, quietly.

"Oh no!" added Mrs. Vansittart.

And Major White moistened his lips with an air of patient toleration for the ways of a sex which had ever been far beyond his comprehension.

"It seems," he said, when the carriage had rolled away over the noisy stones, "that we are in good time. They do not expect him until nearly ten. He has been attempting for some time to get the men to refuse to work, and these same men have written to ask him to meet them at the works at ten o'clock, when Roden is at Utrecht, and Von Holzen is out. There is no question of reaching the works at all. They are going to lie in ambush in a hollow of the Dunes, and knock him on the head about half a mile from here north-east." And Major White paused in this great conversational effort to consult a small gold compass attached to his watch-chain.

The two women waited patiently.

"Fine place, these dunes," said the major, after a pause. "Could conceal three thousand men between here and Scheveningen."

"But it is not a question of hiding soldiers," said Mrs. Vansittart, sharply, with a movement of the head indicative of supreme contempt.

"No," admitted White. "Better hide ourselves, perhaps. No good standing here where everybody can see us. I'll fetch our friend. Think he'll sleep if we let him. Chemist gave him enough to kill a horse."

"But haven't you any plans?" asked Mrs. Vansittart, in despair. "What are you going to do? You are not going to let these brutes kill Tony Cornish? Surely you, as a soldier, must know how to meet this crisis."

"Oh yes. Not much of a soldier, you know," answered White, soothingly, as he moved away towards Uncle Ben. "But I think I know how this business ought to be managed. Come along—hide ourselves."

He led the way across the dunes, dragging Uncle Ben by one arm, and keeping in the hollows. The two women followed in silence on the silent sand.

Once Major White paused and looked back. "Don't talk," he said, holding up a large fat hand in a ridiculous gesture of warning, which he must have learnt in the nursery. He looked like a large baby listening for a bogey in the chimney.

Once or twice he consulted Uncle Ben, and as often glanced at his compass. There was a certain skill in his attitude and demeanour, as if he knew exactly what he was about. Mrs. Vansittart had a hundred questions to ask him, but they died on her lips. The moon rose suddenly over the distant trees and flooded all the sand-hills with light. Major White halted his little party in a deep hollow, and consulted Uncle Ben in whispers. Then bidding him sit down, he left the three alone in their hiding-place, and went away by himself. He climbed almost to the summit of a neighbouring mound, and stopped suddenly, with his face uplifted, as if smelling something. Like many short-sighted persons, he had a keen scent. In a few minutes he came back again.

"I have found them," he whispered to Mrs. Vansittart and Dorothy. "Smelt 'em—like sealing-wax. Eleven of them—waiting there for Cornish." And he smiled with a sort of boyish glee.

"What are you going to do?" whispered Mrs. Vansittart.

"Thump them," he answered, and presently went back to his post of observation.

Uncle Ben had fallen asleep, and the two women stood side by side waiting in the moonlight. It was chilly, and a keen wind swept in from the sea. Dorothy shivered. They could hear certain notes of certain instruments in the band of the Scheveningen Kurhaus, nearly two miles away. It was strange

to be within sound of such evidences of civilization, and yet in such a lonely spot—strange to reflect that eleven men were waiting within a few yards of them to murder one. And yet they could safely have carried out their intention, and have scraped a hole in the sand to hide his body, in the certainty that it would never be found; for these dunes are a miniature desert of Sahara, where nothing bids men leave the beaten paths, where certain hollows have probably never been trodden by the foot of man, and where the ever-drifting sand slowly accumulates—a very abomination of desolation.

At length White rose to his feet agilely enough, and crept to the brow of the dune. The men were evidently moving. Mrs. Vansittart and Dorothy ascended the bank to the spot just vacated by White.

Only a few dozen yards away they could see the black forms of the malgamiters grouped together under the covert of a low hillock. Hidden from their sight, Major White was slowly stalking them.

Dorothy touched Mrs. Vansittart's arm, and pointed silently in the direction of Scheveningen. A man was approaching, alone, across the silvery sand-hills. It was Tony Cornish, walking into the trap laid for him. Major White saw him also, and thinking himself unobserved, or from mere habit acquired among his men, he moistened the tips of his fingers at his lips.

The malgamiters moved forward, and White

followed them. They took up a position in a hollow a few yards away from the foot-path by which Cornish must pass. One of their number remained behind, crouching on a mound, and evidently reporting progress to his companions below. When Cornish was within a hundred yards of the ambush, White suddenly ran up the bank, and lifting this man bodily, threw him down among his comrades. He followed this vigorous attack by charging down into the confused mass. In a few moments the malgamiters streamed away across the sand-hills like a pack of hounds, though pursued and not pursuing. They left some of their number on the sand behind them, for White was a hard hitter.

"Give it to them, Tony!" White cried, with a ring of exultation in his voice. "Knock 'em down as they come!"

For there was only one path, and the malgamiters had to run the gauntlet of Tony Cornish, who knocked some of them over neatly enough as they passed, selecting the big ones, and letting the others go free. He knew them by the smell of their clothes, and guessed their intention readily enough.

It was a strange scene, and one that left the two women, watching it, breathless and eager.

"Oh, I wish I were a man!" exclaimed Mrs. Vansittart, with clenched fists.

They hurried toward Cornish and White, who were now alone on the path. White had rolled up

his sleeve, and was tying his handkerchief round his arm with his other hand and his teeth.

"It is nothing," he said. "One of the devils had a knife. Must get my sleeve mended to-morrow."

CHAPTER XXIII.

A REINFORCEMENT.

"Prends moy telle que je suy."

When Major White came down to breakfast at his hotel the next morning, he found the large room deserted and the windows thrown open to the sun and the garden. He was selecting a table, when a step on the verandah made him look up. Standing in the window, framed, as it were, by sunshine and trees, was Marguerite Wade, in a white dress, with demure lips, and the complexion of a wild rose. She was the incarnation of youth—of that spring-time of life of which the sight tugs at the strings of older hearts; for surely that is the only part of life which is really and honestly worth the living.

Marguerite came forward and shook hands gravely. Major White's left eyebrow quivered for a moment in indication of his usual mild surprise at life and its changing surface.

"Feeling pretty—bobbish?" inquired Marguerite, earnestly.

White's eyebrow went right up and his glass fell.

"Fairly bobbish, thank you," he answered, looking at her with stupendous gravity.

"You look all right, you know."

"You should never judge by appearances," said White with a fatherly severity.

Marguerite pursed up her lips, and looked his stalwart frame up and down in silence. Then she suddenly lapsed into her most confidential manner, like a schoolgirl telling her bosom friend, for the moment, all the truth and more than the truth.

"You are surprised to see me here; thought you would be, you know. I knew you were in the hotel; saw your boots outside your door last night; knew they must be yours. You went to bed very early."

"I have two pairs of boots," replied the major, darkly.

"Well, to tell you the truth, I have brought papa across. Tony wrote for him to come, and I knew papa would be no use by himself, so I came. I told you long ago that the Malgamite scheme was up a gum-tree, and that seems to be precisely where you are."

"Precisely."

"And so I have come over, and papa and I are going to put things straight."

"I shouldn't if I were you."

"Shouldn't what?" inquired Marguerite.

"Shouldn't put other people's affairs straight. It does not pay, especially if other people happen to

be up a gum-tree—make yourself all sticky, you know."

Marguerite looked at him doubtfully. "Ah!" she said. "That's what—is it?"

"That's what," admitted Major White.

"That is the difference, I suppose, between a man and a woman," said Marguerite, sitting down at a small table where breakfast had been laid for two. "A man looks on at things going—well, to the dogs—and smokes and thinks it isn't his business. A woman thinks the whole world is her business."

"So it is, in a sense—it is her doing, at all events."

Marguerite had turned to beckon to the waiter, and she paused to look back over her shoulder with shrewd, clear eyes.

"Ah!" she said mystically.

Then she addressed herself to the waiter, calling him "Kellner," and speaking to him in German, in the full assurance that it would be his native tongue.

"I have told him," she explained to White, "to bring your little coffee-pot and your little milk-jug and your little pat of butter to this table."

"So I understood."

"Ah! Then you know German?" inquired Marguerite, with another doubtful glance.

"I get twopence a day extra pay for knowing German."

Marguerite paused in her selection of a breakfast roll from a silver basket containing that Continental

choice of breads which look so different and taste so much alike.

"Seems to me," she said confidentially, "that you know more than you appear to know."

"Not such a fool as I look, in fact."

"That is about the size of it," admitted Marguerite, gravely. "Tony always says that the world sees more than any one suspects. Perhaps he is right."

And both happening to look up at this moment, their glances met across the little table.

"Tony often is right," said Major White.

There was a pause, during which Marguerite attended to the two small coffee-pots for which she had such a youthful and outspoken contempt. The privileges of her sex were still new enough to her to afford a certain pleasure in pouring out beverages for other people to drink.

"Why is Tony so fond of the Hague? Who is Mrs. Vansittart?" she asked, without looking up.

Major White looked stolidly out of the open window for a few minutes before answering.

"Two questions don't make an answer."

"Not these two questions?" asked Marguerite, with a sudden laugh.

"No; Mrs. Vansittart is a widow, young, and what they usually call 'charming,' I believe. She is clever, yes, very clever, and she was, I suppose, fond of Vansittart; and that is the whole story, I take it."

"Not exactly a cheery story."

"No true stories are," returned the major, gravely.

But Marguerite shook her head. In her wisdom —that huge wisdom of life as seen from the threshold—she did not believe Mrs. Vansittart's story.

"Yes, but novelists and people take a true story and patch it up at the end. Perhaps most people do that with their lives, you know; perhaps Mrs. Vansittart——"

"Won't do that," said the major, staring in a stupid way out of the window with vacant, short-sighted eyes. "Not even if Tony suggested it—which he won't do."

"You mean that Tony is not a patch upon the late Mr. Vansittart—that is what *you* mean," said Marguerite, condescendingly. "Then why does he stay in the Hague?"

Major White shrugged his shoulders and lapsed into a stolid silence, broken only by a demand made presently by Marguerite to the waiter for more bread and more butter. She looked at her companion once or twice, and it is perhaps not astonishing that she again concluded that he must be as dense as he looked. It is a mistake that many of her sex have made regarding men.

"Do you know Miss Roden?" she asked suddenly. "I have heard a good deal about her from Joan."

"Yes."

"Is she pretty?"

"Yes."

"Very pretty?" persisted Marguerite.

"Yes," replied the major.

And they continued their breakfast in silence.

Marguerite appeared to have something to think about. Major White was in the habit of stating that he never thought, and certainly appearances bore him out.

"Your father is late," he said at length.

"Yes," answered Marguerite, with a gay laugh. "Because he was afraid to ring the bell for hot water. Papa has a rooted British conviction that Continental chambermaids always burst into your room if you ring the bell, whether the door is locked or not. He is nothing if not respectable, poor old dear—would give points to any bishop in the land."

As she spoke her father came into the room, looking, as his daughter had stated, eminently British and respectable. He shook hands with Major White, and seemed pleased to see him. The major was, in truth, a man after his own heart, and one whom he looked upon as solid. For Mr. Wade belonged to a solid generation that liked the andante of life to be played in good heavy chords, and looked with suspicious eyes upon brilliancy of execution or lightness of touch.

"I have had a note from Cornish," he said, "who suggests a meeting at this hotel this afternoon to discuss our future action. The other side have, it

appears, written to Lord Ferriby to come over to the Hague." There had in Mr. Wade's life usually been that "other side," which he had treated with a good, honest respect so long as they proved themselves worthy of it; but which he crushed the moment they forgot themselves. For there was in this British banker a vast spirit of honest, open antagonism by which he and his likes have built up a scattered empire on this planet. "At three o'clock," he concluded, lifting the cover of a silver dish which Marguerite had sent back to the kitchen awaiting her father's arrival. "And what will you do, my dear?" he said, turning to her.

"I?" replied Marguerite, who always knew her own mind. "I shall take a carriage and drive down to the Villa des Dunes to see Dorothy Roden. I have a note for her from Joan."

And Mr. Wade turned to his breakfast with an appetite in no way diminished by the knowledge that the "other side" were about to take action.

At three o'clock the carriage was awaiting Marguerite at the door of the hotel, but for some reason Marguerite lingered in the porch, asking questions and absolutely refusing to drive all the way to Scheveningen by the side of the "Queen's Canal." When at length she turned to get in, Tony Cornish was coming across the Toornoifeld under the trees; for the Hague is the shadiest city in the world, with forest trees growing amid its great houses.

"Ah!" said Marguerite, holding out her hand.

"You see, I have come across to give you all a leg-up. Seems to me we are going to have rather a spree."

"The spree," replied Cornish, with his light laugh, "has already begun."

Marguerite drove away towards the Hague Wood, and disappeared among the transparent green shadows of that wonderful forest. The man had been instructed to take her to the Villa des Dunes by way of the Leyden Road, making a round in the woods. It was at a point near the farthest outskirts of the forest that Marguerite suddenly turned at the sight of a man sitting upon a bench at the roadside reading a sheet of paper.

"That," she said to herself, "is the Herr Professor —but I cannot remember his name."

Marguerite was naturally a sociable person. Indeed, a woman usually stops an old and half-forgotten acquaintance, while men are accustomed to let such bygones go. She told the driver to turn round and drive back again. The man upon the bench had scarce looked up as she passed. He had the air of a German, which suggestion was accentuated by the solitude of his position and the poetic surroundings which he had selected. A German, be it recorded to his credit, has a keen sense of the beauties of nature, and would rather drink his beer before a fine outlook than in a comfortable chair indoors. When Marguerite returned, this man looked up again with the absorbed air of one re-

peating something in his mind. When he perceived that she was undoubtedly coming towards himself, he stood up and took off his hat. He was a small, square-built man, with upright hair turning to grey, and a quiet, thoughtful, clean-shaven face. His attitude, and indeed his person, dimly suggested some pictures that have been painted of the great Napoleon. His measuring glance—as if the eyes were weighing the face it looked upon—distinctly suggested his great prototype.

"You do not remember me, Herr Professor," said Marguerite, holding out her hand with a frank laugh. "You have forgotten Dresden and the chemistry classes at Fräulein Weber's?"

"No, Fräulein; I remember those classes," the professor answered, with a grave bow.

"And you remember the girl who dropped the sulphuric acid into the something of potassium? I nearly made a great discovery then, mein Herr."

"You nearly made the greatest discovery of all, Fräulein. Yes, I remember now—Fräulein Wade."

"Yes, I am Marguerite Wade," she answered, looking at him with a little frown, "but I can't remember your name. You were always Herr Professor. And we never called anything by its right name in the chemistry classes, you know; that was part of the—er—trick. We called water H2 or something like that. We called you J. H. U., Herr Professor."

"What does that mean, Fräulein?"

"Jolly hard up," returned Marguerite, with a laugh which suddenly gave place, with a bewildering rapidity, to a confidential gravity. "You were poor then, mein Herr."

"I have always been poor, Fräulein, until now."

But Marguerite's mind had already flown to other things. She was looking at him again with a frown of concentration.

"I am beginning to remember your name," she said. "Is it not strange how a name comes back with a face? And I had quite forgotten both your face and your name, Herr . . . Herr . . . von Holz"—she broke off, and stepped back from him—"von Holzen," she said slowly. "Then you are the malgamite man?"

"Yes, Fräulein," he answered, with his grave smile; "I am the malgamite man."

Marguerite looked at him with a sort of wonder, for she knew enough of the Malgamite scheme to realize that this was a man who ruled all that came near him, against whom her own father and Tony Cornish and Major White and Mrs. Vansittart had been able to do nothing—who in face of all opposition continued calmly to make malgamite, and sell it daily to the world at a preposterous profit, and at the cost only of men's lives.

"And you, Fräulein, are the daughter of Mr. Wade, the banker?"

"Yes," she answered, feeling suddenly that she was a schoolgirl again, standing before her master.

"And why are you in the Hague?"

"Oh," replied Marguerite, hesitating for perhaps the first time in her life, "to enlarge our minds, mein Herr."

She was looking at the paper he held in his hand, and he saw the direction of her glance. In response, he laughed quietly, and held it out towards her.

"Yes," he said, "you have guessed right. It is the Vorschrift, the prescription for the manufacture of malgamite."

She took the paper and turned it over curiously. Then, with her usual audacity, she opened it and began to read.

"Ah," she said, "it is in Hebrew."

Von Holzen nodded his head, and held out his hand for the paper, which she gave to him. She was not afraid of the man—but she was very near to fear.

"And I am sitting here, quietly under the trees, Fräulein," he said, "learning it by heart."

CHAPTER XXIV.

A BRIGHT AND SHINING LIGHT.

"Un homme sérieux est celui qui se croit regardé."

WHEN Lord Ferriby decided to accede to Roden's earnest desire that he should go to the Hague, he was conscious of conferring a distinct favour upon the Low Countries.

"It is not a place one would choose to go to at this time of year," he said to a friend at the club. "In the winter, it is different; for the season there is in the winter, as in many Continental capitals."

One of the numerous advantages attached to an hereditary title is the certainty that a hearer of some sort or another will always be forthcoming. A commoner finds himself snubbed or quietly abandoned so soon as his reputation for the utterance of egoisms and platitudes is sufficiently established, but there are always plenty of people ready and willing to be bored by a lord. A high-class club is, moreover, a very mushroom-bed of bores, where elderly gentlemen who have travelled quite a distance down the road of life, without finding out that it is bordered on either side by a series of small

events not worth commenting upon, meet to discuss trivialities.

"Truth is," said his lordship to one of these persons, "this Malgamite scheme is one of the largest charities that I have conducted, and carries with it certain responsibilities—yes, certain responsibilities."

And he assumed a grave air of importance almost amounting to worry. For Lord Ferriby did not know that a worried look is an almost certain indication of a small mind. Nor had he observed that those who bear the greatest responsibilities, and have proved themselves worthy of the burden, are precisely they who show the serenest face to the world.

It must not, however, be imagined that Lord Ferriby was in reality at all uneasy respecting the Malgamite scheme. Here again he enjoyed one of the advantages of having been preceded by a grandfather able and willing to serve his party without too minute a scruple. For if the king can do no wrong, the nobility may surely claim a certain immunity from criticism, and those who have allowance made to them must inevitably learn to make allowance for themselves. Lord Ferriby was, in a word, too self-satisfied to harbour any doubts respecting his own conduct. Self-satisfaction is, of course, indolence in disguise.

It was easy enough for Lord Ferriby to persuade himself that Cornish was wrong and Roden in the

right; especially when Roden, in the most gentlemanly manner possible, paid a cheque, not to Lord Ferriby direct, but to his bankers, in what he gracefully termed the form of a bonus upon the heavy subscription originally advanced by his lordship. There are many people in the world who will accept money so long as their delicate susceptibilities are not offended by an actual sight of the cheque.

"Anthony Cornish," said Lord Ferriby, pulling down his waistcoat, "like many men who have had neither training nor experience, does not quite understand the ethics of commerce."

His lordship, like others, seemed to understand these to mean that a man may take anything that his neighbour is fool enough to part with.

Joan was willing enough to accompany her father, because, in the great march of social progress, she had passed on from charity to sanitation, and was convinced that the mortality among the malgamiters, which had been more than hinted at in the Ferriby family circle, was entirely due to the negligence of the victims in not using an old disinfectant served up in artistic flagons under a new name. Permanganate of potash under another name will not only smell as sweet, but will perform greater sanitary wonders, because the world places faith in a new name, and faith is still the greatest healer of human ills.

Joan, therefore, proposed to carry to the Hague

the glad tidings of the sanitary millennium, fully convinced that this had come to a suffering world under the name of "Nuxine," in small bottles, at the price of one shilling and a penny halfpenny. The penny halfpenny, no doubt, represented the cost of bottle and drug and the small blue ribbon securing the stopper, while the shilling went very properly into the manufacturer's pocket. It was at this time the fashion in Joan's world to smell of "Nuxine," which could also be had in the sweetest little blue tabloids, to place in the wardrobe and among one's clean clothes. Joan had given Major White a box of these tabloids, which gift had been accepted with becoming gravity. Indeed, the major seemed never to tire of hearing Joan's exordiums, or of watching her pretty, earnest face as she urged him to use "Nuxine" in its various forms, and it was only when he heard that cigar-holders made of "Nuxine" absorbed all the deleterious properties of tobacco that his stout heart failed him.

"Yes," he pleaded, "but a fellow must draw the line at a sky-blue cigar-holder, you know."

And Joan had to content herself with the promise that he would use none other than "Nuxine" dentifrice.

Lord Ferriby and Joan, therefore, set out to the Hague, his lordship in the full conviction (enjoyed by so many useless persons) that his presence was in itself of beneficial effect upon the course of events, and Joan with her "Nuxine" and, in a minor

degree now, her "Malgamiters" and her "Haberdashers' Assistants." Lady Ferriby preferred to remain at Cambridge Terrace, chiefly because it was cheaper, and also because the cook required a holiday, and, with a kitchen-maid only, she could indulge in her greatest pleasure—a useless economy. The cook refused to starve her fellow-servants, while the kitchen-maid, mindful of a written character in the future, did as her ladyship bade her—hashing and mincing in a manner quite irreconcilable with forty pounds a year and beer money.

Major White met the travellers at the Hague station, and Joan, who had had some trouble with her father during the simple journey, was conscious for the first time of a sense of orderliness and rest in the presence of the stout soldier, who seemed to walk heavily over difficulties when they arose.

"Eh—er," began his lordship, as they walked down the platform, "have you seen anything of Roden?"

For Lord Ferriby was too self-centred a man to be keenly observant, and had as yet failed to detect Von Holzen behind and overshadowing his partner in the Malgamite scheme.

"No—cannot say I have," replied the major.

He had never discussed the malgamite affairs with Lord Ferriby. Discussion was, indeed, a pastime in which the major never indulged. His position in the matter was clearly enough defined, but he had no intention of explaining why it was that

he ranged himself stolidly on Cornish's side in the differences that had arisen.

Lord Ferriby was dimly conscious of a smouldering antagonism, but knew the major sufficiently well not to fear an outbreak of hostilities. Men who will face opposition may be divided into two classes —the one taking its stand upon a conscious rectitude, the other half-hiding with the cheap and transparent cunning of the ostrich. Many men, also, are in the fortunate condition of believing themselves to be invariably right unless they are told quite plainly that they are wrong. And there was nobody to tell Lord Ferriby this. Cornish, with a sort of respect for the head of the family—a regard for the office irrespective of its holder—was so far from wishing to convince his uncle of error that he voluntarily relinquished certain strong points in his position rather than strike a blow that would inevitably reach Lord Ferriby, though directed towards Roden or Von Holzen.

Lord Ferriby heard, however, with some uneasiness, that the Wades were in the Hague,

"A worthy man—a very worthy man," he said abstractedly; for he looked upon the banker with that dim suspicion which is aroused in certain minds by uncompromising honesty.

The travellers proceeded to the hotel, where rooms had been prepared for them. There were flowers in Joan's room, which her maid said she had rearranged, so awkwardly had they been placed

in the vase. The Wades, it appeared, were out, and had announced their intention of not returning to lunch. They were, the hotel porter thought, to take that meal at Mrs. Vansittart's.

"I think," said Lord Ferriby, "that I shall go down to the works."

"Yes, do," answered White, with an expressionless countenance.

"Perhaps you will accompany me?" suggested Joan's father.

"No—think not. Can't hit it off with Roden. Perhaps Joan would like to see the Palace in the Wood."

Joan thought that it was her duty to go to the malgamite works, and murmured the word "Nuxine," without, however, much enthusiasm; but White happened to remember that it was mixing-day. So Lord Ferriby went off alone in a hired carriage, as had been his intention from the first; for White knew even less about the ethics of commerce than did Cornish.

The account of affairs that awaited his lordship at the works was, no doubt, satisfactory enough, for the manufacture of malgamite had been proceeding at high pressure night and day. Von Holzen had, as he told Marguerite, been poor all his life, and poverty is a hard task-master. He was not going to be poor again. The grey carts had been passing up and down Park Straat more often than ever, taking their loads to one or other of the

railway stations, and bringing, as they passed her house, a gleam of anger to Mrs. Vansittart's eyes.

"The scoundrels!" she muttered. "The scoundrels! Why does not Tony act?"

But Tony Cornish, who alone knew the full extent of Von Holzen's determination not to be frustrated, could not act—for Dorothy's sake.

A string of the quiet grey carts passed up Park Straat when the party assembled there had risen from the luncheon-table. Mrs. Vansittart and Mr. Wade were standing together at the window, which was large even in this city of large and spotless windows. Dorothy and Cornish were talking together at the other end of the room, and Marguerite was supposed to be looking at a book of photographs.

"There goes a consignment of men's lives," said Mrs. Vansittart to her companion.

"A human life, madam," answered the banker, "like all else on earth, varies much in value."

For Mr. Wade belonged to that class of Englishmen which has a horror of all sentiment, and takes care to cloak its good actions by the assumption of an unworthy motive. And who shall say that this man of business was wrong in his statement? Which of us has not a few friends and relations who can only have been created as a solemn warning?

As Mrs. Vansittart and Mr. Wade stood at the window, Marguerite joined them, slipping her hand within her father's arm with that air of protection

which she usually assumed towards him. She was gay and lively, as she ever was, and Mrs. Vansittart glanced at her more than once with a sort of envy. Mrs. Vansittart did not, in truth, always understand Marguerite or her English, which was essentially modern.

They were standing and laughing at the window, when Marguerite suddenly drew them back.

"What is it?" asked Mrs. Vansittart.

"It is Lord Ferriby," replied Marguerite.

And looking cautiously between the lace curtains, they saw the great man drive past in his hired carriage.

"He has recently bought Park Straat," commented Marguerite.

And his lordship's condescending air certainly seemed to suggest that the street, if not the whole city, belonged to him.

Mr. Wade pointed with his thick thumb in the direction in which Lord Ferriby was driving.

"Where is he going?" he asked bluntly.

"To the malgamite works," replied Mrs. Vansittart, with significance.

And Mr. Wade made no comment. Mrs. Vansittart spoke first.

"I asked Major White," she said, "to lunch with us to-day, but he was pledged, it appeared, to meet Lord Ferriby and his daughter, and see them installed at their hotel."

"Ah!" said Mr. Wade.

Mrs. Vansittart, who in truth seemed to find the banker rather heavy, allowed some moments to elapse before she again spoke.

"Major White," she then observed, "does not accompany Lord Ferriby to the malgamite works."

"Major White," replied Marguerite, demurely, "has other fish to fry."

CHAPTER XXV.

CLEARING THE AIR.

"It is as difficult to be entirely bad as it is to be entirely good."

PERCY RODEN, who had been to Utrecht and Antwerp, arrived home on the evening of the day that saw Lord Ferriby's advent to the Hague. Though the day had been fine enough, the weather broke up at sunset, and great clouds chased the sun towards the west. Then the rain came suddenly and swept across the plains in a slanting fury. A cold wind from the south-east followed hard upon the heavy clouds, and night came in a chaos of squall and beating rain. Roden was drenched in his passage from the carriage to the Villa des Dunes, which, being a summer residence, had not been provided with a carriage-drive across the dunes from the road. He looked at his sister with tired eyes when she met him in the entrance-hall. He was worn and thinner than she had seen him in the days of his adversity, for Percy Roden, like his partner, had made several false starts upon the road to fortune before he got well away. Like many—like, indeed, nearly all—who have to try again, he had lightened

himself of a scruple or so each time he turned back. Prosperity, however, seems to kill as many as adversity. Abundant wealth is a vexation of spirit to-day as surely as it was in the time of that wise man who, having tried it, said that a stranger eateth it, and it is vanity.

"Beastly night," said Roden, and that was all. He had been to Antwerp on banking business, and had that sleepless look which brings a glitter to the eyes. This was a man handling great sums of money. "Von Holzen been here to-day?" he asked, when he had changed his clothes, and they were seated at the dinner-table.

"No," answered Dorothy, with her eyes on his plate.

He was eating little, and drank only mineral water from a stone bottle. He was like an athlete in training, though the strain he sought to meet was mental and not physical. He shivered more than once, and glanced sharply at the door when the maid happened to leave it open.

When Dorothy went to the drawing-room she lighted the fire, which was ready laid, and of wood. Although it was nearly midsummer, the air was chilly, and the rain beat against the thin walls of the house.

"I think it probable," Roden had said, before she left the dining-room, "that Von Holzen will come in this evening."

She sat down before the fire, which burnt briskly,

and looked into it with thoughtful, clever grey eyes. Percy thought it probable that Von Holzen would come to the Villa des Dunes this evening. Would he come? For Percy knew nothing of the organized attempt on Cornish's life which she herself had frustrated. He seemed to know nothing of the grim and silent antagonism that existed between the two men, shutting his eyes to their movements, which were like the movements of chess-players that the onlooker sees but does not understand. Dorothy knew that Von Holzen was infinitely cleverer than her brother. She knew, indeed, that he was cleverer than most men. With the quickness of her sex, she had long ago divined the source and basis of his strength. He was indifferent to women—who formed no part of his life, who entered in no way into his plans or ambitions. Being a woman, she should, theoretically, have disliked and despised him for this. As a matter of fact, the characteristic commanded her respect.

She knew that her brother was not in Von Holzen's confidence. It was probable that no man on earth had ever come within measurable distance of that. He would, in all likelihood, hear nothing of the attempt to kill Cornish, and Cornish himself would be the last to mention it. For she knew that her lover was a match for Von Holzen, and more than a match. She had never doubted that. It was a part of her creed. A woman never really loves a man until she has made him the object of a creed.

And it is only the man himself who can—and in the long run usually does—make it impossible for her to adhere to her belief.

She was still sitting and thinking over the fire when her brother came into the room.

"Ah!" he said at the sight of the fire, and came forward, holding out his hands to the blaze. He looked down at his sister with glittering and unsteady eyes. He was in a dangerous humour—a humour for explanations and admissions—to which weak natures sometimes give way. And, looking at the matter practically and calmly, explanations and admissions are better left—to the hereafter. But Von Holzen saved him by ringing the front-door bell at that moment.

The professor came into the room a minute later. He stood in the doorway, and bowed in the stiff German way to Dorothy. With Roden he exchanged a curt nod. His hair was glued to his temples by the rain, which gleamed on his face.

"It is an abominable night," he said, coming forward. "Ach, Fräulein, please do not leave us—and the fire," he added; for Dorothy had risen. "I merely came to make sure that he had arrived safely home." He took the chair offered to him by Roden, and sat on it without bringing it forward. He had but little of that self-assurance which is so highly cultivated to-day as to be almost offensive. "There are, of course, matters of business," he said, "which can wait till to-morrow. To-night you are

tired." He looked at Roden as a doctor may look at a patient. "Is it not so, Fräulein?" he asked, turning to Dorothy.

"Yes."

"Except one or two—which we may discuss now."

Dorothy turned and glanced at him. He was looking at her, and their eyes met for a moment. He seemed to see something in her face that made him thoughtful, for he remained silent for some time, while he wiped the rain from his face with his pocket-handkerchief. It was a pale, determined face, which could hardly fail to impress those with whom he came in contact as the face of a strong man.

"Lord Ferriby has been at the works to-day," he said; and then, with a gesture of the hands and a shrug, he described Lord Ferriby as a nonentity. "He went through the works, and looked over your books. I wrote out a sort of certificate of his satisfaction with both, and—he signed it."

Roden was leaning forward over the fire with a cigarette between his lips. He nodded shortly.

"Good," he said.

"Yesterday," continued Von Holzen, "I met an old acquaintance—a Miss Wade—one of the young ladies of a Pensionnat at Dresden, in which I taught at one time. She is a daughter of the banker Wade, and told me, reluctantly, that she is at the Hague with her father—a friend of Cornish's. This morning I took a walk on the sands at Scheveningen; there was a large fat man, among others, bathing

at the Northern bathing-station. It was Major White. It is a regular gathering of the clans. I saw a German paper-maker—a big man in the trade—on the Kursaal terrace this morning. It may be a mere chance, and it may not."

As he spoke he had withdrawn from his pocket a folded paper, which he was fingering thoughtfully. Dorothy, who knew that she had by her looks unwittingly warned him, made no motion to go now. He would say nothing that he did not deliberately intend for her ears as much as for her brother's. Von Holzen opened the paper slowly, and looked at it as if every line of it was familiar. It was a sheet of ordinary foolscap covered with minute figures and writing.

"It is the Vorschrift, the—how do you say?—prescription for the malgamite, and there are several in the Hague at this moment who want it, and some who would not be too scrupulous in their methods of procuring it. It is for this that they are gathering—here in the Hague."

Roden turned in his leisurely way, and looked over his shoulder towards the paper. Von Holzen glanced at Dorothy. He had no desire to keep her in suspense, but he wished to know how much she knew. She looked into the fire, treating his conversation as directed towards her brother only.

"I tried for ten years in vain to get this," continued Von Holzen, "and at last a dying man dictated it to me. For years it lived in the brain of one

man only—and he a maker of it himself. He might have died at any moment with that secret in his head. And I"—he folded the paper slowly and shrugged his shoulders—"I watched him. And the last intelligible word he spoke on earth was the last word of this prescription. The man can have been no fool; for he was a man of little education. I never respected him so much as I do now when I have learnt it myself." He rose and walked to the fire. "You permit me, Fräulein," he said, putting the logs together with his foot.

They burnt up brightly, and he threw the paper upon them. In a moment it was reduced to ashes. He turned slowly upon his heel, and looked at his companions with the grave smile of one who had never known much mirth.

"There," he said, touching his forehead with one finger; "it is in the brain of one man—once more." He returned to the chair he had just vacated. "And whosoever wishes to stop the manufacture of malgamite will need to stop that brain," he said, with a soft laugh. "Of course there is a risk attached to burning that paper," he continued, after a pause. "My brain may go—a little clot of blood no bigger than a pin's head, and the greatest brain on earth is so much pulp! It may be worth some one's while to kill me. It is so often worth some one's while to kill somebody else, even at a considerable risk—but the courage is nearly always lacking. However, we must run these risks."

He rose from his chair with a low and rather pleasant laugh, glancing at the clock as he did so. It was evidently his intention to take his leave. Dorothy rose also, and they stood for a moment facing each other. He was a few inches above her stature, and he looked down at her with his slow, thoughtful eyes. He seemed always to be making a diagnosis of the souls of men.

"I know, Fräulein," he said, "that you are one of those who dislike me, and seek to do me harm. I am sorry. It is long since I discarded a youthful belief that it was possible to get on in life without arousing ill feeling. Believe me, it is impossible even to hold one's own in this world without making enemies. There are two sides to every question, Fräulein—remember that."

He brought his heels together, bowed stiffly, from the waist in his formal manner, and left the room. Percy Roden followed him, leaving the door open. Dorothy heard the rustle of his dripping waterproof as he put it on, the click of the door, the sound of his firm retreating tread on the gravel. Then her brother came back into the room. His rather weak face was flushed. His eyes were unsteady. Dorothy saw this in a glance, and her own face hardened unresponsively. The situation was clearly enough defined in her own mind. Von Holzen had destroyed the prescription before her on purpose. It was only a move in that game of life which is always extending to a new deal, and of which women as

onlookers necessarily see the most. Von Holzen wished Cornish, and others concerned, to know that he had destroyed the prescription. It was a concession in disguise—a retrograde movement—perhaps *pour mieux sauter*.

Percy Roden was one of those men who have a grudge against the world. The most hopeless ill-doer is he who excuses himself angrily. There are some who seem unconscious of their own failings, and for these there is hope. They may some day find out that it is better to be at peace with the world even at the cost of a little self-denial. But Percy Roden admitted that he was wrong, and always had that sort of excuse which seeks to lay the blame upon a whole class—upon other business men, upon those in authority, upon women.

"It is excused in others, why not in me?"—the last cry of the ne'er-do-well.

He glanced angrily at Dorothy now. But he was always half afraid of her.

"I wish we had never come to this place," he said.

"Then let us go away from it," answered Dorothy, "before it is too late."

Roden looked at her in surprise. Did she expect him to go away now from Mrs. Vansittart? He knew, of course, that Dorothy and the world always expected too much from him.

"Before it is too late. What do you mean?" he asked, still thinking of Mrs. Vansittart.

"Before the Malgamite scheme is exposed," replied Dorothy, bluntly. And, to her surprise, he laughed.

"I thought you meant something else," he said. "The Malgamite scheme can look after itself. Von Holzen is the cleverest man I know, and he knows what he is doing. I thought you meant Mrs. Vansittart—were thinking of her."

"No, I was not thinking of Mrs. Vansittart."

"Not worth thinking about," suggested Roden, adhering to his method of laughing for fear of being laughed at, which is common enough in very young men; but Roden should have outgrown it by this time.

"Not seriously."

"What do you mean, Dorothy?"

"That I hope you do not think seriously of asking Mrs. Vansittart to marry you."

Roden gave his rather unpleasant laugh again. "It happens that I do," he replied. "And it happens that I know that Mrs. Vansittart never stays in the Hague in summer when all the houses are empty and everybody is away, and the place is given up to tourists, and becomes a mere annex to Scheveningen. This year she has stayed—why, I should like to know."

And he stroked his moustache as he looked into the fire. He had been indulging in the vain pleasure of putting two and two together. A young

man's vanity—or indeed any man's vanity—is not to be trusted to work out that simple addition correctly. Percy Roden was still in a dangerously exalted frame of mind. There is no intoxication so dangerous as that of success, and none that leaves so bitter a taste behind it.

"Of course," he said, "no girl ever thinks that her brother can succeed in such a case. I suppose you dislike Mrs. Vansittart?"

"No; I like her, and I understand her, perhaps better than you do. I should like nothing better than she should marry you, but——"

"But what?"

"Well, ask her," replied Dorothy—a woman's answer.

"And then?"

"And then let us go away from here."

Roden turned on her angrily. "Why do you keep on repeating that?" he cried. "Why do you want to go away from here?"

"Because," replied Dorothy, as angry as himself, "you know as well as I do that the Malgamite scheme is not what it pretends to be. I suppose you are making a fortune and are dazzled, or else you are being deceived by Herr von Holzen, or else——"

"Or else——" echoed Roden, with a pale face. "Yes—go on."

But she bit her lip and was silent. "It is an open secret," she went on, after a pause. "Everybody

knows that it is a disgrace or worse—perhaps a crime. If you have made a fortune, be content with what you have made, and clear yourself of the whole affair."

"Not I."

"Why not?"

"Because I am going to make more. And I am going to marry Mrs. Vansittart. It is only a question of money. It always is with women. And not one in a hundred cares how the money is made."

Which, of course, is not true; for no woman likes to see her husband's name on a biscuit or a jam-pot.

"Of course," went on Percy, in his anger, "I know which side you take, since you are talking of open secrets. At any rate, Von Holzen knows yours—if it is a secret—for he has hinted at it more than once. You think that it is I who have been deceived or who deceive myself. You are just as likely to be wrong. You place your whole faith in Cornish. You think that Cornish cannot do wrong."

Dorothy turned and looked at him. Her eyes were steady, but the colour left her face, as if she were afraid of what she was about to say.

"Yes," she said, "I do."

"And without a moment's hesitation," went on Roden, hurriedly, "you would sacrifice everything

for the sake of a man you had never seen six months ago ? "

" Yes."

" Even your own brother ? "

" Yes," answered Dorothy.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE ULTIMATUM.

"Le plus grand, le plus fort et le plus adroit surtout, est celui qui sait attendre."

"If you think that Herr von Holzen is a philanthropist, my dear," said Marguerite Wade, sententiously, "that is exactly where your toes turn in."

She addressed this remark to Joan Ferriby, whose eyes were certainly veiled by that cloak of charity which the kind-hearted are ever ready to throw over the sins of others. The two girls were sitting in the quiet old-world garden of the hotel, beneath the shade of tall trees, within the peaceful sound of the cooing doves on the tiled roof. Major White was sitting within earshot, looking bulky and solemn in his light tweed suit and felt hat. The major had given up appearances long ago, but no man surpassed him in cleanliness and that well-groomed air which distinguishes men of his cloth. He was reading a newspaper, and from time to time glanced at his companions, more especially, perhaps, at Joan.

"Major White," said Marguerite.

"Yes."

"Greengage, please."

The greengages were on a table at the major's elbow, having been placed there, at Marguerite's command, by the waiter who attended them at breakfast. White made ready to pass the dish.

"Fingers," said Marguerite. "Heave one over."

White selected one with an air of solemn resignation. Marguerite caught the greengage as neatly as it was thrown.

"What do you think of Herr von Holzen?" she asked.

"To think," replied the major, "certain requisites are necessary."

"Um—m."

"I do not know Herr von Holzen, and I have nothing to think with," he explained gravely.

"Well, you soon will know him, and I dare say if you tried you would find that you are not so stupid as you pretend to be. You are going down to the works this morning with papa and Tony Cornish. I know that, because papa told me."

The major looked at her with his air of philosophic surprise. She held up her hand for a catch, and with resignation he threw her another greengage.

"Tony is going to call for you in a carriage at ten o'clock, and you three old gentlemen are going

to drive in an open barouche, with cigars, like a beanfeast, to the malgamite works."

"The description is fairly accurate," admitted Major White, without looking up from his paper.

"And I imagine you are going to raise—Hail Columbia!"

He looked at her severely through his glass, and said nothing. She nodded in a friendly and encouraging manner, as if to intimate that he had her entire approval.

"Take my word for it," she continued, turning to Joan, "Herr von Holzen is a shady customer. I know a shady customer when I see him. I never thought much of the malgamite business, you know, but unfortunately nobody asked my opinion on the matter. I wonder——" She paused, looking thoughtfully at Major White, who presently met her glance with a stolid stare. "Of course!" she said, in a final voice. "I forgot. You never think. You can't. Oh no!"

"It is so easy to misjudge people," pleaded Joan, earnestly.

"It is much easier to see right through them, straight off, in the twinkling of a bedpost," asserted Marguerite. "You will see, Herr von Holzen is wrong and Tony is right. And Tony will smash him up. You will see. Tony"—she paused, and looked up at the roof where the doves were cooing—"Tony knows his way about."

Major White rose and laid aside his paper. Mr.

Wade was coming down the iron steps that led from the verandah to the garden. The banker was cutting a cigar, and wore a placid, comfortable look, as if he had breakfasted well. Even as regards kidneys and bacon in a foreign hotel, where there is a will there is a way, and Marguerite possessed tongues.

"I'll turn this place inside out," she had said, "to get the old thing what he wants." Then she attacked the waiter in fluent German.

Marguerite noted his approach with a protecting eye. "It's all solid common sense," she said in an undertone to Joan, referring, it would appear, to his bulk.

In only one respect was she misinformed as to the arrangements for the morning. Tony Cornish was not coming to the hotel to fetch Mr. Wade and White, but was to meet them in the shadiest of all thoroughfares and green canals, the Koninginne Gracht, where at midday the shadows cast by the great trees are so deep that daylight scarcely penetrates, and the boats creep to and fro like shadows. This amendment had been made in view of the fact that Lord Ferriby was in the hotel, and was, indeed, at this moment partaking of a solemn breakfast in his private sitting-room overlooking the Toornoifeld.

His lordship did not, therefore, see these two solid pillars of the British constitution walk across the corner of the Korte Voorhout, cigar in lip, in

a placid silence begotten, perhaps, of the knowledge that, should an emergency arise, they were of a material that would arise to meet it.

Cornish was awaiting them by the bank of the canal. He was watching a boat slowly work its way past him. It was one of the large boats built for traffic on the greater canals and the open waters of the Scheldt estuary. It was laden from end to end with little square boxes bearing only a number and a port mark in black stencil. A pleasant odour of sealing-wax dominated the weedy smell of the canal.

"Wherever you turn you meet the stuff," was Cornish's greeting to the two Englishmen.

Major White, with his delicate sense of smell, sniffed the breeze. Mr. Wade looked at the canal-boat with a nod. Commercial enterprise, and, above all, commercial success, commanded his honest respect.

They entered the carriage awaiting them beneath the trees. Cornish was, as usual, quick and eager, a different type from his companions, who were not brilliant as he was, nor polished.

They found the gates of the malgamite works shut, but the door-keeper, knowing Cornish to be a person of authority, threw them open, and directed the driver to wait outside till the gentlemen should return. The works were quiet, and every door was closed.

"Is it mixing-day?" asked Cornish.

"Every day is mixing-day now, mein Herr, and there are some who work all night as well. If the gentlemen will wait a moment, I will seek Herr Roden."

And he left them standing beneath the brilliant sun in the open space between the gate and the cottage where Von Holzen lived. In a few moments he returned, accompanied by Percy Roden, who emerged from the office in his shirt-sleeves, pen in hand. He shook hands with Cornish and White, glanced at Mr. Wade, and half bowed. He did not seem glad to see them.

"We want to look at your books," said Cornish. "I suppose you will make no objection?"

Roden bit his moustache, and looked at the point of his pen.

"You and Major White?" he suggested.

"And this gentleman, who comes as our financial adviser."

Roden raised his eyebrows rather insolently. "Ah—may I ask who this gentleman is?" he said.

"My name is Wade," answered the banker, characteristically, for himself.

Roden's face changed, and he glanced at the great financier with a keen interest.

"I have no objection," he said, after a moment's hesitation, "if Von Holzen will agree. I will go and ask him."

And they were left alone in the sunshine once

more. Mr. Wade watched Roden as he walked towards the factory.

"Not the sort of man I expected," he commented, "but he has the right shaped head for figures. He is shrewd enough to know that he cannot refuse, so gives in with a good grace."

In a few minutes Von Holzen approached them, emerging from the factory alone. He bowed politely, but did not offer to shake hands. He had not seen Cornish since the evening when he had offered to make malgamite before him, and the experiment had taken such a deadly turn. He looked at him now, and found his glance returned by an illegible smile. The question flashed through his mind and showed itself on his face as to why Roden had made such a mistake as to introduce a man like this into the Malgamite scheme.

Von Holzen invited the gentlemen into the office. "It is small, but it will accommodate us," he said, with a smile.

He drew forward chairs, and offered one to Cornish in particular, with a grim deference. He seemed to have divined that their last meeting in this same office had been, by tacit understanding, kept a secret. There is for some men a certain satisfaction in antagonism, and a stern regard for a strong foe—which reached its culmination, perhaps, in that Saxon knight who desired to be buried in the same chapel as his lifelong foe—be-

tween him, indeed, and the door—so that at the resurrection day they should not miss each other.

Von Holzen seemed to have somewhat of this feeling for Cornish. He offered him the best seat at the table. Roden was taking his books from a safe—huge ledgers bound in green pigskin, slim cash-books, cloth-bound journals. He named them as he laid them on the table before Mr. Wade. Major White looked at the great tomes with solemn and silent awe. Mr. Wade was already fingering his gold pencil-case. He eyed the closed books with an anticipatory gleam of pleasure in his face—as a commander may eye the arranged squadrons of the foe.

"It is, of course, understood that this audit is strictly in confidence?" said Von Holzen. "For your own satisfaction, and not in any sense for publication. It is a trade secret."

"Of course," answered Cornish, to whom the question had been addressed.

"We trust to the honour of these gentlemen."

Cornish looked up and met the speaker's grave eyes. "Yes," he said.

Roden having emptied the large safe, leant his shoulder against the iron mantelpiece, and looked down at those seated at the table—especially at Mr. Wade. His hands were in his pockets; his face wore a careless smile. He had not resumed his coat, and the cleanliness of the books testified to the fact that he always worked in shirt-sleeves.

It was a trick of the trade, which exonerated him from the necessity of apologizing.

Mr. Wade took the great ledgers, opened them, fluttered the pages with his fingers, and set them aside one after the other. Then Roden seemed to recollect something. He went to a drawer, and took from it a packet of neatly folded papers, held together by elastic rings. The top one he unfolded, and laid on the table before Mr. Wade.

"Trial balance-sheet of 31st of March," he said.

Mr. Wade glanced up and down the closely-written columns, which were like copper-plate—an astounding mass of figures. The additions in the final column ran to six numerals. The banker folded the paper, and laid it aside. Then he turned to the slim cash-books, which he glanced at casually. The journals he set aside without opening. He handled the books with a sort of skill, showing that he knew how to lift them with the least exertion, how to open them and close them and turn their stiff pages. The enormous mass of figures did not seem to appal him; the maze was straight enough beneath such skilful eyes. Finally, he turned to a small locked ledger, of which the key was attached to Roden's watch-chain, who came forward and unlocked the book. Mr. Wade turned to the index at the beginning of the volume, found a certain account, and opened the book there. At the sight of the figures he raised his eyebrows, and glanced up at Roden.

"Whew!" he exclaimed, beneath his breath. He had arrived at his destination—had torn the heart out of these great books. All in the room were watching his placid, shrewd old face. He studied the books for some time, and then took a sheet of blank paper from a number of such attached by a string to a corner of the table. He reflected for some minutes, pushing the movable part of his gold pencil in and out pensively as he did so. Then he wrote a number of figures on the sheet of paper and handed it to Cornish. He closed the locked ledger with a snap. The audit of the malgamite books was over.

"It is a wonderful piece of single-handed bookkeeping," he said to Roden.

Cornish was studying the paper set before him by the banker. The proceedings seemed to have been pre-arranged, for no word was exchanged. There was no consultation on either side. Finally, Cornish folded the paper and tore it into a hundred pieces, in scrupulous adherence to Von Holzen's conditions. Mr. Wade was sitting back in his chair, thoughtfully amusing himself with his gold pencil-case. Cornish looked at him for a moment, and then spoke, addressing Von Holzen.

"We came here to make a final proposal to you," he said; "to place before you, in fact, our ultimatum. We do not pretend to conceal from you the fact that we are anxious to avoid all publicity, all scandal. But if you drive us to it, we shall un-

hesitatingly face both in order to close these works. We do not want the Malgamite scheme to be dragged as a charity in the mud, because it will inevitably drag other charities with it. There are certain names connected with the scheme which we should prefer, moreover, to keep from the clutches of the cheaper democratic newspapers. We know the weakness of our position."

"And we know the strength of ours," put in Von Holzen, quietly.

"Yes. We recognize that also. You have hitherto slipped in between international laws, and between the laws of men. Legally we should have difficulty in getting at you, but it can be done. Financially——" He paused, and looked at Mr. Wade."

"Financially," said the banker, without lifting his eyes from his pencil-case, "we shall in the long run inevitably smash you—though the books are all right."

Roden smiled, with his long white fingers at his moustache.

"From the figures supplied to me by Mr. Wade," continued Cornish, "I see that there is an enormous profit lying idle—so large a profit that even between ourselves it is better not mentioned. There are, or there were yesterday, two hundred and ninety-two malgamite makers in active work."

Von Holzen made an involuntary movement, and Cornish looked at him over the pile of books.

"Oh!" he said, "I know that. And I know the number of deaths. Perhaps you have not kept count, but I have. From the figures supplied by Mr. Wade, I see, therefore, that we have sufficient to pension off these two hundred and ninety-two men and their families—giving each man one hundred and twenty pounds a year. We can also make provision for the widows and orphans out of the sum I propose to withdraw from the profits. There will then be left a sum representing two large fortunes—of say between three and four thousand a year each. Will you and Mr. Roden accept this sum, dividing it as you think fit, and hand over the works to me? We ask you to take it—no questions asked—and go."

"And Lord Ferriby?" suggested Von Holzen.

Major White made a sudden movement, but Cornish laid his hand quickly upon the soldier's arm.

"I will manage Lord Ferriby. What is your answer?"

"No," replied Von Holzen, instantly, as if he had long known what the ultimatum would be.

Cornish turned interrogatively to Roden. His eyes urged Roden to accept.

"No," was the reply.

Mr. Wade took out his large gold watch, and looked at it.

"Then there is no need," he said composedly, "to detain these gentlemen any longer."

CHAPTER XXVII.

COMMERCE.

"The world will not believe a man repents.
And this wise world of ours is mainly right."

"THEN you are of opinion, my dear White, that one cannot well refuse to meet these—er—persons?"

"Not," replied Major White to Lord Ferriby, whose hand rested on his stout arm as they walked with dignity in the shade of the trees that border the Vyver—that quaint old fish-pond of the Hague —"not without running the risk of being called a d——d swindler."

For the major was a lamentably plain-spoken man, who said but little, and said that little strong. Lord Ferriby's affectionate grasp of the soldier's arm relaxed imperceptibly. One must, he reflected, be prepared to meet unpleasantness in the good cause of charity—but there are words hardly applicable to the peerage, and Major White had made use of one of these.

"Public opinion," observed the major, after some minutes of deep thought, "is a difficult

thing to deal with—'cos you cannot thump the public."

"It is notably hard," said his lordship, firing off one of his pet platform platitudes, "to induce the public to form a correct estimate, or what one takes to be a correct estimate."

"Especially of one's self," added the major, looking across the water towards the Binnenhof, in his vacant way.

Then they turned and walked back again beneath the heavy shade of the trees. The conversation, and indeed this dignified promenade on the Vyverberg, had been brought about by a letter which his lordship had received that same morning inviting him to attend a meeting of paper-makers and others interested in the malgamite trade to consider the position of the malgamite charity, and the advisability of taking legal proceedings to close the works on the dunes at Scheveningen. The meeting was to be held at the Hôtel des Indes, at three in the afternoon, and the conveners hinted pretty plainly that the proceedings would be of a decisive nature. The letter left Lord Ferriby with a vague feeling of discomfort. His position was somewhat isolated. A coldness had for some time been in existence between himself and his nephew Tony Cornish. Of Mr. Wade Lord Ferriby was slightly distrustful.

"These commercial men," he often said, "are apt to hold such narrow views."

And, indeed, to steer a straight course through life, one must not look to one side or the other.

There remained Major White, of whom Lord Ferriby had thought more highly since Fortune had called this plain soldier to take a seat among the gods of the British public. For no man is proof against the satisfaction of being able to call a celebrated person by his Christian name. The major had long admired Joan, in his stupid way, from, as one might say, the other side of the room. But neither Lord nor Lady Ferriby had encouraged this silent suit. Joan was theoretically one of those of whom it is said that "she might marry anybody," and who, as the keen observer may see for himself, often finishes by failing to marry at all. She was pretty and popular, and had moreover, the *entrée* to the best houses. White had been useful to Lord Ferriby ever since the inauguration of the Malgamite scheme. He was not uncomfortably clever, like Tony Cornish. He was an excellent buffer at jarring periods. Since the arrival of Joan and her father at the Hague, the major had been almost a necessity in their daily life, and now, quite suddenly, Lord Ferriby found that this was the only person to whom he could turn for advice or support.

"One cannot suppose," he said, in the full conviction that words will meet any emergency—"one cannot suppose that Von Holzen will act in direct opposition to the voice of the majority."

"Von Holzen," replied the major, "plays a doocid good game."

After luncheon they walked across the Toornoifeld to the Hôtel des Indes, and there, in a small *salon*, found a number of gentlemen seated round a table. Mr. Wade was conspicuous by his absence. They had, indeed, left him in the hotel garden, sitting at the consumption of an excellent cigar.

"Join the jocund dance?" the major had inquired, with a jerk of the head towards the Hôtel des Indes.

But Mr. Wade was going for a drive with Marguerite.

Tony Cornish was, however, seated at the table, and the major recognized two paper-makers, whom he had seen before. One was an aggressive, red-headed man, of square shoulders and a dogged appearance, who had "radical" written all over him. The other was a mild-mannered person, with a thin, ash-coloured moustache. The major nodded affably. He distinctly remembered offering to fight these two gentlemen either together or one after the other on the landing of the little malgamite office in Westminster. And there was a faint twinkle behind the major's eye-glass as he saluted them.

"Good morning, Thompson," he said. "How do, MacHewlett?" For he never forgot a face or a name.

"A'hm thinking——" Mr. MacHewlett was ob-

serving, but his thoughts died a natural death at the sight of a real lord, and he rose and bowed. Mr. Thompson remained seated, and made that posture as aggressive and obvious as possible. The remainder of the company were of varied nationality and appearance, while one—a Frenchman of keen dark eyes and a trim beard—seemed by tacit understanding to be the acknowledged leader. Even the pushing Mr. Thompson silently deferred to him by a gesture that served at once to introduce Lord Ferriby and invite the Frenchman to up and smite him.

Lord Ferriby took the seat that had been left vacant for him at the head of the table. He looked round upon faces not too friendly.

"We were saying, my lord," said the Frenchman, in perfect English, and with that graceful tact which belongs to France alone, "that we have all been the victims of an unfortunate chain of misunderstandings. Had the organizers of this great charity consulted a few paper-makers before inaugurating the works at Scheveningen, much unpleasantness might have been averted, many lives might, alas! have been spared. But—well—such mundane persons as ourselves were probably unknown to you and unthought of; the milk is spilt, is it not so? Let us rather think of the future."

Lord Ferriby bowed graciously, and Mr. Thompson moved impatiently on his chair. The suave method had no attractions for him.

"A'hm thinking," began Mr. MacHewlett, in his most plaintive voice, and commanded so sudden and universal an attention as to be obviously disconcerted, "his lordship'll need plainer speech than that," he muttered hastily, and subsided, with an uneasy glance in the direction of that man of action, Major White.

"One misunderstanding has, however, been happily dispelled," said the Frenchman, "by our friend—if monsieur will permit the word—our friend, Mr. Cornish. From this gentleman we have learned that the executive of the Malgamite Charity are not by any means in harmony with the executive of the malgamite works at Scheveningen; that, indeed, the charity repudiates the action of its servants in manufacturing malgamite by a dangerous process tacitly and humanely set aside by makers up to this time; that the administrators of the fund are no party to the 'corner' which has been established in the product; do not desire to secure a monopoly, and disapprove of the sale of malgamite at a price which has already closed one or two of the smaller mills, and is paralyzing the paper trade of the world."

The speaker finished with a bow towards Cornish, and resumed his seat. All were watching Lord Ferriby's face, except Major White, who examined a quill pen with short-sighted absorption. Lord Ferriby looked across the table at Cornish.

"Lord Ferriby," said Cornish, without rising from

his seat, and meeting his uncle's glance steadily, "will now no doubt confirm all that Monsieur Creil has said."

Lord Ferriby had, in truth, come to the meeting with no such intention. He had, with all his vast experience, no knowledge of a purely commercial assembly such as this. His public had hitherto been a drawing-room public. He was accustomed to a flower-decked platform, from which to deliver his flowing periods to the emotional of both sexes. There were no flowers in this room at the Hôtel des Indes, and the men before him were not of the emotional school. They were, on the contrary, plain, hard-headed men of business, who had come from different parts of the world at Cornish's bidding to meet a crisis in a plain, hard-headed way. They had only thoughts of their balance-sheets, and not of the fact that they held in the hollow of their hands the lives of hundreds, nay, of thousands, of men, women, and children. Monsieur Creil alone, the keen-eyed Frenchman, had absolute control of over three thousand employees—married men with children—but he did not think of mentioning the fact. And it is a weight to carry about with one—to go to sleep with and to awake with in the morning—the charge of, say, nine thousand human lives.

For a few moments Lord Ferriby was silent. Cornish watched him across the table. He knew that his uncle was no fool, although his wisdom amounted to little more than the wisdom of the

worldly. Would Lord Ferriby recognize the situation in time? There was a wavering look in the great man's eye that made his nephew suddenly anxious. Then Lord Ferriby rose slowly, to make the shortest speech that he had ever made in his life.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I beg to confirm what has just been said."

As he sat down again, Cornish gave a sharp sigh of relief. In a moment Mr. Thompson was on his feet, his red face alight with democratic anger.

"This won't do," he cried. "Let's have done with palavering and talk. Let's get to plain speaking."

And it was not Lord Ferriby, but Tony Cornish, who rose to meet the attack.

"If you will sit down," he said, "and keep your temper, you shall have plain speaking, and we can get to business. But if you do neither, I shall turn you out of the room."

"You?"

"Yes," answered Tony.

And something which Mr. Thompson did not understand made him resume his seat in silence. The Frenchman smiled, and took up his speech where he had left it.

"Mr. Cornish," he said, "speaks with authority. We are, gentlemen, in the hands of Mr. Cornish, and in good hands. He has this matter at the tips of his fingers. He has devoted himself to it for many months past, at considerable risk, as I suspect, to

his own safety. We and the thousands of employees whom we represent cannot do better than entrust the situation to him, and give him a free hand. For once, capital and labour have a common interest——"

He was again interrupted by Mr. Thompson, who spoke more quietly now.

"It seems to me," he said, "that we may well consider the past for a few minutes before passing on to the future. There's more than a million pounds profit, at the lowest reckoning, on the last few months' manufacture. Question is, where is that profit? Is this a charity, or is it not? Mr. Cornish is all very well in his way. But we're not fools. We're men of business, and as such can only presume that Mr. Cornish, like the rest of 'em, has had his share. Question is, where are the profits?"

Major White rose slowly. He was seated beside Mr. Thompson, and, standing up, towered above him. He looked down at the irate red face with a calm and wondering eye.

"Question is," he said gravely, "where the deuce you will be in a few minutes if you don't shut up."

Whereupon Mr. Thompson once more resumed his seat. He had the satisfaction, however, of perceiving that his shaft had reached its mark; for Lord Ferriby looked disconcerted and angry. The chairman of many charities looked, moreover, a little puzzled, as if the situation was beyond his com-

prehension. The Frenchman's pleasant voice again broke in, soothingly and yet authoritatively.

"Mr. Cornish and a certain number of us have, for some time, been in correspondence," he said. "It is unnecessary for me to suggest to my present hearers that in dealing with a large industry—in handling, as it were, the lives of a number of persons—it is impossible to proceed too cautiously. One must look as far ahead as human foresight may perceive—one must give grave and serious thought to every possible outcome of action or inaction. Gentlemen, we have done our best. We are now in a position to say to the administrators of the Malgamite Fund, close your works and we will do the rest. And this means that we shall provide for the survivors of this great commercial catastrophe, that we shall care for the widows and children of the victims, that we shall supply ourselves with malgamite of our own manufacture, produced only by a process which is known to be harmless, that we shall make it impossible that such a monopoly may again be declared. We have, so far as lies in our power, provided for every emergency. We have approached the two men who, from their retreat on the dunes of Scheveningen, have swayed one of the large industries of the world. We have offered them a fortune. We have tried threats and money, but we have failed to close the malgamite works. We have but one alternative, and that is—war. We are prepared in every way. We can to-morrow take over the manufacture of malgamite

for the whole world—but we must have the works on the dunes at Scheveningen. We must have the absolute control of the Malgamite Fund and of the works. We propose, gentlemen, to seize this control, and invest the supreme command in the one man who is capable of exercising it—Mr. Anthony Cornish."

The Frenchman sat down, looked across the table, and shrugged his shoulders impatiently; for the irrepressible Thompson was already on his feet. It must be remembered that Mr. Thompson worked on commission, and had been hard hit.

"Then," he cried, pointing a shaking forefinger into Lord Ferriby's face, "that man has no business to be sitting there. We're honest here—if we're nothing else. We all know your history, my fine gentleman; we know that you cannot wipe out the past, so you're trying to whitewash it over with good works. That's an old trick, and it won't go down here. Do you think we don't see through you and your palavering speeches? Why have you refused to take action against Roden and Von Holzen? Because they've paid you. Look at him, gentlemen! He has taken money from those men at Scheveningen—blood money. He has had his share. I propose that Lord Ferriby explains his position."

Mr. Thompson banged his fist on the table, and at the same moment sat down with extreme precipitation, urged thereto by Major White's hand on his collar.

"This is not a vestry meeting," said the major, sternly.

Lord Ferriby had risen to his feet. "My position, gentlemen," he began, and then faltered, with his hand at his watch-chain. "My position——" He stopped with a gulp. His face was the colour of ashes. He turned in a dazed way towards his nephew; for at the beginning and the end of life blood is thicker than water. "Anthony," said his lordship, and sat down heavily.

All rose to their feet in confusion. Major White seemed somehow to be quicker than the rest, and caught Lord Ferriby in his arms—but Lord Ferriby was dead.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WITH CARE.

"Some man holdeth his tongue, because he hath not to answer: and some keepeth silence, knowing his time."

THOSE who live for themselves alone must at least have the consolatory thought that when they die the world will soon console itself. For it has been decreed that he who takes no heed of others shall himself be taken no heed of. We soon learn to do without those who are indifferent to us and useless to us. Lord Ferriby had so long and so carefully studied the *culte* of self that even those nearest to him had ceased to give him any thought, knowing that in his own he was in excellent hands—that he would always ask for what he wanted. It was Lord Ferriby's business to make the discovery (which all selfish people must sooner or later achieve) that the best things in this world are precisely those which may not be given on demand, and for which, indeed, one may in nowise ask.

When Major White and Cornish were left alone in the private *salon* of the Hôtel des Indes—when the doctor had come and gone, when the blinds had

been decently lowered, and the great man silently laid upon the sofa—they looked at each other without speaking. The grimmest silence is surely that which arises from the thought that of the dead one may only say what is good.

"Would you like me," said Cornish, "to go across and tell Joan?"

And Major White, whose god was discipline, replied, "She's your cousin. It is for you to say."

"I shall be glad if you will go," said Cornish, "and leave me to make the other arrangements. Take her home to-morrow, or to-night if she wants to, and leave us—me—to follow."

So Major White quitted the Hôtel des Indes, and walked slowly down the length of the Toornoifeld, leaving Cornish alone with Lord Ferriby, whose death made his nephew suddenly a richer man.

The Wades had gone out for a drive in the wood. Major White knew that he would find Joan alone at the hotel. Bad news has a strange trick of clearing the way before it. The major went to the *salon* on the ground floor overlooking the corner of the Vyverberg. Joan was writing a letter at the window.

"Ah!" she said, turning, pen in hand, "you are soon back. Have you quarrelled?"

White went stolidly across the room towards her. There was a chair by the writing-table, and here he

sat down. Joan was looking uneasily into his face. Perhaps she saw more in that immovable countenance than the world was pleased to perceive.

"Your father was taken suddenly ill," he said, "during the meeting."

Joan half rose from her chair, but the major laid his protecting hand over hers. It was a large, quiet hand—like himself, somewhat suggestive of a buffer. And it may, after all, be no mean *rôle* to act as a buffer between one woman and the world all one's life.

"You can do nothing," said White. "Tony is with him."

Joan looked into his face in speechless inquiry.

"Yes," he answered, "your father is dead."

Then he sat there in a silence which may have been intensely stupid or very wise. For silence is usually cleverer than speech, and always more interesting. Joan was dry-eyed. Well may the children of the selfish arise and bless their parents for (albeit unwittingly) alleviating one of the necessary sorrows of life.

After a silence, Major White told Joan how the calamity had occurred, in a curt military way, as of one who had rubbed shoulders with death before, who had gone out, moreover, to meet him with a quiet mind, and had told others of the dealings of the destroyer. For Major White was deemed a lucky man by his comrades, who had a habit of giving him messages for their friends before they went into the

field. Perhaps, moreover, the major was of the opinion of those ancient writers who seemed to deem it more important to consider how a man lives than how he dies.

"It was some heart trouble," he concluded, "brought on by worry or sudden excitement."

"The Malgamite," answered Joan. "It has always been a source of uneasiness to him. He never quite understood it."

"No," answered the major, very deliberately, "he never quite understood it." And he looked out of the window with a thoughtful, non-committing face.

"Neither do I—understand it," said Joan, doubtfully.

And the major looked suddenly dense. He had, as usual, no explanation to offer.

"Was father deceived by some one?" Joan asked, after a pause. "One hears such strange rumours about the Malgamite Fund. I suppose father was deceived?"

She spoke of the dead man with that hushed voice which death, with a singular impartiality to race or creed, seems to demand of the survivors wheresoever he passes.

White met her earnest gaze with a grave nod. "Yes," he answered, "he was deceived."

"He said, before he went out, that he did not want to go to the meeting at all," went on Joan, in a tone of tender reminiscence, "but that he had

always made a point of sacrificing his inclination to his sense of duty. Poor father!"

"Yes," said the major, looking out of the window. And he bore Joan's steady, searching glance like a man.

"Tell me," she said suddenly. "Were you and Tony deceived also?"

Major White reflected for a moment. It is unwise to tell even the smallest lie in haste.

"No," he answered at length. "Not so entirely as your father."

He uncrossed his legs, and made a feeble attempt to divert her thoughts.

But Joan was on the trail as it were of a half-formed idea in her own mind, and she would not have been a woman if she had relinquished the quest so easily.

"But you were deceived at first?" she inquired, rather anxiously. "I know Tony was. I am sure of it. Perhaps he found out later; but you——"

She drew her hand from under his rather hastily, having just found out that it was in that equivocal position.

"You were never deceived," she said, with a suspicion of resentment.

"Well—perhaps not," admitted the major, reluctantly. And he looked regretfully at the hand she had withdrawn. "Don't know much about charities," he continued, after a pause. "Don't quite look at them in the right light, perhaps. Seems

to me that you ought to be more business-like in charities than in anything else; and we're not business men—not even you."

He looked at her very solemnly and wisely, as if the thoughts in his mind would be of immense value if he could only express them; but he was without facilities in that direction. If one cannot be wise, the next best thing is to have a wise look. He rose, for he had caught sight of Tony Cornish crossing the Toornoifeld in the shade of the trees. Perhaps the major had forgotten for the moment that a great man was dead; that there were letters to be written and telegrams to be despatched; that the world must know of it, and the insatiable maw of the public be closed by a few scraps of news. For the public mind must have its daily food, and the wise are they who tell it only that which it is expedient for it to know.

Lord Ferriby's life was, moreover, one that needed careful obituary treatment. Everybody's life may for domestic purposes be described as a hash; but Lord Ferriby's was a hash which in the hands of a cheap democratic press might easily be served up so daintily as to be very savoury in the nostrils of the world. Some of its component parts were indeed exceedingly ancient, and, so to speak, gamey, while the Malgamite scheme alone might easily be magnified into a very passable scandal.

Tony came into the room, keen and capable. He did not show much feeling. Perhaps Joan and he

understood each other without any such display. For they had known each other many years, and had understood other and more subtle matters without verbal explanation. For the world had been pleased to say that Joan and Tony must in the end inevitably marry. And they had never explained, never contradicted, and never married.

While the three were still talking, a carriage rattled up to the door of the hotel, and then another. There began, in a word, that hushed confusion—that running to and fro as of ants upon a disturbed ant-hill—which follows hard upon the footsteps of the grim messenger, who himself is content to come so quietly and unobtrusively. Roden arrived to make inquiries, and Mrs. Vansittart, and a messenger from more than one embassy. Then the Wades came, brought hurriedly back by a messenger sent after them by Tony Cornish.

Marguerite, with characteristic energy, came into the room first, slim and bright-eyed. She looked from one face to the other, and then crossed the room and stood beside Joan without speaking. She was smiling—a little hard smile with close-set lips—showing the world a face that meant to take life open-eyed, as it is, and make the best of it.

Before long the two girls quitted the room, leaving the three men to their hushed discussion. Tony had already provided himself with pen and paper. In twelve hours that which the world

must know about Lord Ferriby should be in print. There was just time to cable it to the *Times* and the news agencies. And in these hurried days it is the first word which, after all, goes farthest and carries most weight. A contradiction is at all times a poor expedient.

"I have silenced the paper-makers," said Cornish, sitting down to write, "even that ass Thompson, by striking while the iron was hot."

"And Roden won't open his lips," added Mr. Wade, who, as he drove up, had seen that brilliant financier uneasily strolling under the trees of the Toornoifeld, looking towards the hotel; for Lord Ferriby's death was a link in the crooked malgamite chain which even Von Holzen had failed to foresee.

Indeed, Lord Ferriby must have been gratified could he have seen the posthumous pother that he made by dying at this juncture. For in life he had only been important in his own eyes, and the world had taken little heed of him. This same keen-sighted world would not regret him much now, and would assuredly mete out to that miserly old screw, his widow, only as much sympathy as the occasion deserved. Lady Ferriby would, the world suspected, sell off his lordship's fancy waistcoats, and proceed to save money to her heart's content. Even the thought of his club subscriptions, now necessarily to be discontinued, must have assuaged a large part of the widow's grief. Such, at least,

was the opinion of the clubs themselves, when the news was posted up among the weather reports and the latest tapes from the House that same evening.

While Lord Ferriby's friends were comfortably endowing him with a few compensating virtues over their tea and hot buttered toast in Pall Mall and St. James's Street, Mr. Wade, Tony, and White dined together at the Hotel of the Old Shooting Gallery at the Hague. The hour was an early one, and had never been countenanced by Lord Ferriby, but the three men in whose hands he had literally left his good name did not attach supreme importance to this matter. Indeed, the banker thought kindly of six-thirty as an hour at which in earlier days he had been endowed with a better appetite than he ever possessed now at eight o'clock or later. While they were at table a telegram was handed to Cornish. It was from Lord Ferriby's solicitor in London, and contained the advice that Tony Cornish had been appointed sole executor of his lordship's will.

"Thank God!" said Tony, with a little laugh, as he read the message and handed it across to Mr. Wade, who looked at it gravely without comment. "And now," said Cornish, "not even Joan need know."

For Cornish, having perceived Percy Roden under the trees of the Toornoifeld, had gone out there to speak to him, and in answer to a plain question

had received a plain answer as to the price that Lord Ferriby had been paid for the use of his name in the Malgamite Fund transactions.

Joan had elected to remain in her own rooms, with Marguerite to keep her company, until the evening, when, under White's escort, she was to set out for England. The major had in a minimum of words expressed himself ready to do anything at any time, provided that the service did not require an abnormal conversational effort.

"I shall be home twenty-four hours after you," said Cornish, as he bade Joan good-bye at the station. "And you need believe no rumours and fear no gossip. If people ask impertinent questions, refer them to White."

"And I'll thump them," added the major, who indeed looked capable of rendering that practical service.

They were favoured by a full moon and a perfect night for their passage from the Hook of Holland to Harwich. Joan expressed a desire to remain on deck, at all events, until the lights of the Maas had been left behind. Major White procured two deck chairs, and found a corner of the upper deck which was free alike from too much wind and too many people. There they sat in the shadow of a boat, and Joan seemed fully occupied with her own thoughts, for she did not speak while the steamer ploughed steadily onwards through the smooth water.

"I wonder if it is my duty to continue to take an active part in the Malgamite Fund," she said at length.

And the major, who had been permitted to smoke, looked attentively at the lighted end of his cigar, and said nothing.

"I am afraid it must be," continued Joan, whose earnest endeavours to find out what was her duty, and do it, occupied the larger part of her time and attention.

"Why?" asked Major White.

"Because I don't want to."

The major thought about the matter for a long time—almost half through a cigar. It was wonderful how so much thought could result in so few words, especially in these days, which are essentially days of many words and few thoughts. During this period of meditation, Joan sat looking out to sea, and the moon shining down upon her face showed it to be puckered with anxiety. Like many of her contemporaries, she was troubled by an intense desire to do her duty, coupled with an unfortunate lack of duties to perform.

"I wish you would tell me what you think," she said.

"Seems to me," said White, "that your duty is clear enough."

"Yes?"

"Yes. Drop the Malgamiters and the Haberdashers and all that, and—marry me."

But Joan only shook her head sadly. "That cannot be my duty," she said.

"Why? 'Cos it isn't unpleasant enough?"

"No," answered Joan, after a pause, in the deepest earnestness—"no—that's just it."

Out of which ambiguous observation the major seemed to gather some meaning, for he looked up at the moon with one of his most vacant smiles.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A LESSON.

"Whom the gods mean to destroy, they blind."

MRS. VANSITTART had passed the age of blind love. She had not the incentive of a healthy competition. She had not that more dangerous incentive of middle-aged vanity, which draws the finger of derision so often in the direction of widows. And yet she took a certain pleasure in playing a half-careless and wholly cynical Juliet to Percy Roden's *gauche* Romeo. She had no intention of marrying him, and yet she continued to encourage him even now that open war was declared between Cornish and the malgamite makers. Cornish had indeed thanked Mrs. Vansittart for her assistance in the past in such a manner as to convey to her that she could hardly be of use to him in the future. He had magnified her good offices, and had warned her to beware of arousing Von Holzen's anger. Indeed, her use of Percy Roden was at an end, and yet she would not let him go. Cornish was puzzled, and so was Dorothy. Percy Roden was gratified, and read the riddle by the light of his own vanity.

Mrs. Vansittart was not, perhaps, the first woman to puzzle her neighbours by refusing to relinquish that which she did not want. She was not the first, perhaps, to nurse a subtle desire to play some part in the world rather than be left idle in the wings. So she played the part that came first and easiest to her hand—a woman's natural part, of stirring up strife between men.

She was, therefore, gratified when Von Holzen made his way slowly towards her through the crowd on the Kursaal terrace one afternoon on the occasion of a Thursday concert. She was sitting alone in a far corner of the terrace, protected by a glass screen from the wind which ever blows at Scheveningen. She never mingled with the summer visitors at this popular Dutch resort—indeed, knew none of them. Von Holzen seemed to be similarly situated; but Mrs. Vansittart knew that he did not seek her out on that account. He was not a man to do anything—much less be sociable—out of idleness. He only dealt with his fellow-beings when he had a use for them.

She returned his grave bow with an almost imperceptible movement of the head, and for a moment they looked hard at each other.

"Madame still lingers at the Hague," he said.

"As you see."

"And is the game worth the candle?"

He laid his hand tentatively on a chair, and looked towards her with an interrogative glance.

He would not, it appeared, sit down without her permission. And, womanlike, she gave it, with a shrug of one shoulder. A woman rarely refuses a challenge.

"And is the game worth the candle?" he repeated.

"One can only tell when it is played out," was the reply; and Herr von Holzen glanced quickly at the lady who made it.

He turned away and listened to the music. An occasional concert was the one diversion he allowed himself at this time from his most absorbing occupation of making a fortune. He had probably a real love of music, which is not by any means given to the good only, or the virtuous. Indeed, it is the art most commonly allied to vice.

"By the way," said Von Holzen, after a pause, "that paper which it pleased madame's fantasy to possess at one time—is destroyed. Its teaching exists only in my unworthy brain."

He turned and looked at her with his slow smile, his measuring eyes.

"Ah!"

"Yes; so madame need give the question no more thought, and may turn her full attention to her new—fancy."

Mrs. Vansittart was studying her programme, and did not look up or display the slightest interest in what he was saying.

"Every event seems but to serve to strengthen

our position," went on Von Holzen, still half listening to the music. "Even the untimely death of Lord Ferriby—which might at first have appeared a *contretemps*. Cornish takes home the coffin by to-night's mail, I understand. Men may come, madame, and men may go—but we go on for ever. We are still prosperous—despite our friends. And Cornish is nonplussed. He does not know what to do next, and fate seems to be against him. He has no luck. We are manufacturing—day and night."

"You are interested in Mr. Cornish," observed Mrs. Vansittart, coolly; and she saw a sudden gleam in Von Holzen's eyes.

After all, the man had a passion over which his control was insecure—the last, the longest of the passions—hatred. He shrugged his shoulders.

"He has forced himself upon our notice—unnecessarily, as the result has proved—only to find out that there is no stopping us."

He could scarcely control his voice as he spoke of Cornish, and looked away as if fearing to show the expression of his eyes.

Mrs. Vansittart watched him with a cool little smile. Von Holzen had not come here to talk of Cornish. He had come on purpose to say something which he had not succeeded in saying yet, and she was not ignorant of this. She was going to make it as difficult as possible for him, so that when he at last said what he had come to say, she should know it, and perhaps divine his motives.

"Even now," he continued, "we have succeeded beyond our expectations. We are rich men, so that madame—need delay no longer." He turned and looked her straight in the eyes.

"I?" she inquired, with raised eyebrows. "Need delay no longer—in what?"

"In consummating the happiness of my partner, Percy Roden," he was clever enough to say without being impertinent. "He—and his banking account—are really worth the attention of any lady."

Mrs. Vansittart laughed, and, before answering, acknowledged stiffly the stiff salutation of a passer.

"Then it is suggested that I am waiting for Mr. Roden to be rich enough in order to marry him?"

"It is the talk of gossips and servants."

Mrs. Vansittart looked at him with an amused smile. Did he really know so little of the world as to take his information from gossips and servants?

"Ah," she said, and that was all. She rose and made a little signal with her parasol to her coachman who was waiting in the shadow of the Kursaal. As she drove home, she wondered why Von Holzen was afraid that she should marry Percy Roden, who, as it happened, was coming to tea in Park Straat that evening. Mrs. Vansittart had not exactly invited him—not, at all events, that he was aware of. He was under the impression that he had himself proposed the visit.

She remembered that he was coming, but gave no further thought to him. All her mind was, indeed, absorbed with thoughts of Von Holzen, whom she hated with the dull and deadly hatred of the helpless. The sight of him, the sound of his voice, stirred something within her that vibrated for hours, so that she could think of nothing else—could not even give her attention to the little incidents of daily life. She pretended to herself that she sought retribution—that she wished on principle to check a scoundrel in his successful career. The heart, however, knows no principles; for these are created by and belong to the mind. Which explains why many women seem to have no principles and many virtuous persons no heart.

Mrs. Vansittart went home to make a careful toilet pending the arrival of Percy Roden. She came down to the drawing-room, and stood idly at the window. "The talk of gossips and servants," she repeated bitterly to herself. One of Von Holzen's shafts had, at all events, gone home. And Percy Roden came into the room a few minutes afterwards. His manner had more assurance than when he had first made Mrs. Vansittart's acquaintance. He had, perhaps, a trifle less respect for the room and its occupant. Mrs. Vansittart had allowed him to come nearer to her; and when a woman allows a man of whom she has a low opinion to come near to her, she trifles with her own self-respect, and does harm which, perhaps, may never be repaired.

"I was too busy to go to the concert this afternoon," he said, sitting down in his loose-limbed way.

His assumption that his absence had been noticed rather nettled his hearer.

"Ah! Were you not there?" she inquired.

He turned and looked at her with his curt laugh. "If I had been there you would have known it," he said.

It was just one of those remarks—delivered in the half-mocking voice assumed in self-protection—which Mrs. Vansittart had hitherto allowed to pass unchallenged. And now, quite suddenly, she resented the manner and the speech.

"Indeed," she said, with a subtle inflection of tone which should have warned him.

But he was engaged in drawing down his cuffs. Many young men would know more of the world if they had no cuffs or collars to distract them.

"Yes," answered Roden; "if I had gone to the concert it would not have been for the music."

Percy Roden's method of making love was essentially modern. He threw to Mrs. Vansittart certain scraps of patronage and admiration, which she could pick up seriously and keep if she cared to. But he was not going to risk a wound to his vanity by taking the initiative too earnestly. Mrs. Vansittart, who was busy at the tea-table, set down a cup which she had in her hand and crossed the room towards him.

"What do you mean, Mr. Roden?" she asked slowly.

He looked up with wavering eyes, and visibly lost colour under her gaze.

"What do I mean?"

"Yes. What do you mean when you say that, if you had gone to the concert, it would not have been for the music; that if you had been there, I should have known of your presence, and a hundred other—impertinences?"

At first Roden thought that the way was being made easy for him as it is in books, as, indeed, it sometimes is in life, when it happens to be a way that is not worth the treading; but the last word stung him like a lash—as it was meant to sting. It was, perhaps, that one word that made him rise from his chair.

"If you meant to object to anything that I may say, you should have done so long ago," he said. "Who was the first to speak at the hotel when I came to the Hague? Which of us was it that kept the friendship up and cultivated it? I am not blind. I could hardly be anything else, if I had failed to see what you have meant all along."

"What have I meant all along?" she asked, with a strange little smile.

"Why, you have meant me to say such things as I have said, and perhaps more."

"More—what can you mean?"

She looked at him still with a smile, which he did

not understand. And, like many men, he allowed his vanity to explain things which his comprehension failed to elucidate.

"Well," he said, after a moment's hesitation, "will you marry me? There!"

"No, Mr. Roden, I will not," she answered promptly; and then suddenly her eyes flashed, at some recollection, perhaps—at some thought connected with her happy past contrasted with this sordid, ignoble present.

"You!" she cried. "Marry you!"

"Why," he asked, with a bitter little laugh, "what is there wrong with me?"

"I do not know what there is wrong with you. And I am not interested to inquire. But, so far as I am concerned, there is nothing right."

A woman's answer after all, and one of those reasons which are no reasons, and yet rule the world.

Roden looked at her, completely puzzled. In a flash of thought he recalled Dorothy's warning, and her incomprehensible foresight.

"Then," he said, lapsing in his self-forgetfulness into the terse language of his everyday life and thought, "what on earth have you been driving at all along?"

"I have been driving at Herr Holzen and the Malgamite scheme. I have been helping Tony Cornish," she answered.

So Percy Roden quitted the house at the corner

of Park Straat a wiser man, and perhaps he left a wiser woman in it.

"My dear," said Mrs. Vansittart to Marguerite Wade, long afterwards, when a sort of friendship had sprung up and ripened between them—"my dear, never let a man ask you to marry him unless you mean to say yes. It will do neither of you any good."

And Marguerite, who never allowed another the last word, gave a shrewd little nod before she answered—

"I always say no—before they ask me."

CHAPTER XXX.

ON THE QUEEN'S CANAL.

"There's not a crime—
But takes its proper change still out in crime
If once rung on the counter of this world."

CORNISH went back to the Hague immediately after Lord Ferriby's funeral, because it has been decreed that for all men this large world shall, sooner or later, narrow down to one city, perhaps, or one village, or a single house. For a man's life is always centred round a memory or a hope, and neither of those requires much space wherein to live. Tony Cornish's world had narrowed to the Villa des Dunes on the sand-hills of Scheveningen, and his mind's eye was always turned in that direction. His one thought at this time was to protect Dorothy—to keep, if possible, the name she bore from harm and ill-fame. Each day that passed meant death to the malgamite workers. He could not delay. He dared not hurry. He wrote again to Percy Roden from London, amid the hurried preparations for the funeral, and begged him to sever his connection with Von Holzen.

"You will not have time," he wrote, "to answer this before I leave for the Hague. I shall stay on the Toornoifeld as usual, and hope to arrive about nine o'clock to-morrow evening. I shall leave the hotel about a quarter-past nine and walk down the right-hand bank of the Koninginne Gracht, and should like to meet you by the canal, where we can have a talk. I have many reasons to submit to your consideration why it will be expedient for you to come over to my side in this difference now, which I cannot well set down on paper. And remember that between men of the world, such as I suppose we may take ourselves to be, there is no question of one of us judging the other. Let me beg of you to consider your position in regard to the Malgamite scheme —and meet me to-morrow night between the Malie Veld and the Achter Weg about half-past nine. I cannot see you at the works, and it would be better for you not to come to my hotel."

The letter was addressed to the Villa des Dunes, where Roden received it the next morning. Dorothy saw it, and guessed from whom it was, though she hardly knew her lover's writing. He had adhered firmly to his resolution to keep himself in the background until he had finished the work he had undertaken. He had not written to her; had scarcely seen her. Roden read the letter, and put it in his pocket without a word. It had touched his vanity. He had had few dealings with men of the standing and position of Cornish, and

here was this peer's nephew and peer's grandson appealing to him as to a friend, classing him together with himself as a man of the world. No man has so little discretion as a vain man. It is almost impossible for him to keep silence when speech will make for his glorification.

Roden arrived at the works well-pleased with himself, and found Von Holzen in their little office, put out, ill at ease, domineering. It was unfortunate, if you will. Percy Roden was always ready to perceive his own ill-fortune, and looked back later to this as one of his most untoward hours. Life, however, should surely consist of seizing the fortunate and fighting through the ill moments—else why should men have heart and nerve?

In such humours as they found themselves it did not take long for these two men to discover a question upon which to differ. It was a mere matter of detail connected with the money at that time passing through their hands.

"Of course," said Roden, in the course of a useless and trivial dispute—"of course you think you know best, but you know nothing of finance—remember that. Everybody knows that it is I who have run that part of the business. Ask old Wade, or White—or Cornish."

The argument had, in truth, been rather one-sided. For Roden had done all the talking, while Von Holzen looked at him with a quiet eye and a silent contempt that made him talk all the more

Von Holzen did not answer now, though his eye lighted at the mention of Cornish's name. He merely looked at Roden with a smile, which conveyed as clearly as words Von Holzen's suggestion that none of the three men named would be prepared to give Roden a very good character.

"I had a letter, by the way, from Cornish this morning," said Roden, lapsing into his grander manner, which Von Holzen knew how to turn to account.

"Ah—bah!" he exclaimed sceptically. And that lurking vanity of the inferior to lessen his own inferiority did the rest.

"If you don't believe me, there you are," said Roden, throwing the letter upon the table—not ill-pleased, in the heat of the moment, to show that he was a more important person than his companion seemed to think.

Von Holzen read the letter slowly and thoughtfully. The fact that it was evidently intended for Roden's private eye did not seem to affect one or the other of these two men, who had travelled, with difficulty, along the road to fortune, only reaching their bourn at last with a light stock of scruples and a shattered code of honour. Then he folded it, and handed it back. He was not likely to forget a word of it.

"I suppose you will go," he said. "It will be interesting to hear what he has to say. That letter is a confession of weakness."

In making which statement Von Holzen showed his own weak point. For, like many clever men, he utterly failed to give to women their place—the leading place—in the world's history as in the little histories of our daily lives. He never detected Dorothy between every line of Cornish's letter, and thought that it had only been dictated by inability to meet the present situation.

"I cannot very well refuse to go, since the fellow asks me," said Roden, grandly. He might as well have displayed his grandeur to a statue. If love is blind, self-love is surely half-witted as well; for it never sees nor understands that the world is fooling it.

Roden failed to heed the significant fact that Von Holzen did not even ask him what line of conduct he intended to follow with regard to Cornish, nor seek in his autocratic way to instruct him on that point; but turned instead to other matters, and did not again refer to Cornish or the letter he had written.

So the day wore on, while Cornish impatiently walked the deck of the steamer, ploughing its way across the North Sea, through showers and thunderstorms and those grey squalls that flit to and fro on the German Ocean. And some tons of malgamite were made, while a manufacturer or two of the grim product laid aside his tools for ever, while the money flowed in, and Otto von Holzen thought out his deep silent plans over his vats and tanks

and crucibles. And all the while those who write in the book of fate had penned the last decree.

Cornish arrived punctually at the Hague. He drove to the hotel, where he was known, where, indeed, he had never relinquished his room. There was no letter for him—no message from Percy Roden. But Von Holzen had unobtrusively noted his arrival at the station from the crowded retreat of the second-class waiting-room.

The day had been a very hot one, and from canal and dyke arose that sedgy odour which comes with the cool of night in all Holland. It is hardly disagreeable, and conveys no sense of unhealthiness. It seems merely to be the breath of still waters, and, in hot weather, suggests very pleasantly the relief of northern night. The Hague had two dominant smells. In winter, when the canals are frozen, the reek of burning-peat is on the air, and in the summer the odour of slow waters. Cornish knew them both. He knew everything about this old-world city, where the turning-point of his life had been fixed. It was deserted now. The great houses, the theatre—the show-places—were closed. The Toornoifeld was empty.

The hotel porter, aroused by the advent of the traveller from an after-dinner nap in his little glass box, spread out his hands with a gesture of surprise.

"The season is over," he said. "We are empty. Why you come to the Hague now?"

Even the sentries at the end of the Korte Voorhout wore a holiday air of laxness, and swung their rifles idly. Cornish noticed that only half of the lamps were lighted.

The banks of the Queen's Canal are heavily shaded by trees, which, indeed, throw out their branches to meet above the weed-sown water. There is a broad throughfare on either side of the canal, though little traffic passes that way. These are two of the many streets of the Hague which seem to speak of a bygone day, when Holland played a greater part in the world's history than she does at present, for the houses are bigger than the occupants must need, and the streets are too wide for the traffic passing through them. In the middle the canal—a gloomy corridor beneath the trees—creeps noiselessly towards the sea.

Cornish was before the appointed hour, and walked leisurely by the pathway between the trees and the canal. Soon the houses were left behind, and he passed the great open space called the Malie Veld. He had met no one since leaving the guard-house. It was a dark night, with no moon, but the stars were peeping through the riven clouds.

"Unless he stands under a lamp I shall not see him," he said to himself, and lighted a cigar to indicate his whereabouts to Roden, should he elect to keep the appointment. When he had gone a few paces farther he saw some one coming towards him. There was a lamp halfway between them,

and, as he approached the light, Cornish recognized Roden. There was no mistaking the long loose stride.

"I wonder," said Cornish, "if this is going to be the end?"

And he went forward to meet the financier.

"I was afraid you would not come," he said, in a voice that was friendly enough, for he was a man of the world, and in that which is called Society (with a capital letter) had rubbed elbows all his life with many who had no better reputation than Percy Roden, and some who deserved a worse.

"Oh, I don't mind coming," answered Roden, "because I did not want to keep you waiting here in the dark. But it is no good, I tell you that at the outset."

"And nothing I can say will alter your decision?"

"Nothing. A man does not get two such chances as this in his lifetime. I am not going to throw this one away for the sake of a sentiment."

"Sentiment hardly describes the case," said Cornish, thoughtfully. "Do you mean to tell me that you do not care about all these deaths—about these poor devils of malgamiters?"

And he looked hard at his companion beneath the lamp.

"Not a d——n," answered Roden. "I have been poor—you haven't. Why, man! I have starved inside a good coat. You don't know what that means."

Cornish looked at him, and said nothing. There was no mistaking the man's sincerity—nor the manner in which his voice suddenly broke when he spoke of hunger.

"Then there are only two things left for me to do," said Cornish, after a moment's reflection. "Ask your sister to marry me first, and smash you up afterwards."

Roden, who was smoking, threw his cigarette away. "You mean to do both these things?"

"Both."

Roden looked at him. He opened his lips to speak, but suddenly leapt back.

"Look out!" he cried, and had barely time to point over Cornish's shoulder.

Cornish swung round on his heel. He belonged to a school and generation which, with all its faults, has, at all events, the redeeming quality of courage. He had long learnt to say the right thing, which effectually teaches men to do the right thing also. He saw some one running towards him, noiselessly, in rubber shoes. He had no time to think, and scarce a moment in which to act, for the man was but two steps away with an upraised arm, and in the lamplight there flashed the gleam of steel.

Cornish concentrated his attention on the upraised arm, seizing it with both hands, and actually swinging his assailant off his legs. He knew in an instant who it was, without needing to recognize

the smell of malgamite. This was Otto von Holzen, who had not hesitated to state his opinion —that it is often worth a man's while to kill another.

While his feet were still off the ground, Cornish let him go, and he staggered away into the darkness of the trees. Cornish, who was lithe and quick, rather than of great physical force, recovered his balance in a moment, and turned to face the trees. He knew that Von Holzen would come back. He distinctly hoped that he would. For man is essentially the first of the "game" animals, and beneath fine clothes there nearly always beats a heart ready, quite suddenly, to snatch the fearful joy of battle.

Von Holzen did not disappoint him, but came flying on silent feet, like some beast of prey, from the darkness. Cornish had played half-back for his school not so many years before. He collared Von Holzen low, and let him go, with a cruel skill, heavily on his head and shoulder. Not a word had been spoken, and, in the stillness of the summer night, each could hear the other breathing.

Roden stood quite still. He could scarcely distinguish the antagonists. His own breath came whistling through his teeth. His white face was ghastly and twitching. His sleepy eyes were awake now, and staring.

Each charge had left Cornish nearer to the canal. He was standing now quite at the edge. He could

smell, but he could not see the water, and dared not turn his head to look. There is no railing here as there is nearer the town.

In a moment Von Holzen was on his feet again. In the dark, mere inches are much equalized between men—but Von Holzen had a knife. Cornish, who held nothing in his hands, knew that he was at a fatal disadvantage.

Again Von Holzen ran at him with his arm outstretched for a swinging stab. Cornish, in a flash of thought, recognized that he could not meet this. He stepped neatly aside. Von Holzen attempted to stop—stumbled—half recovered himself, and fell headlong into the canal.

In a moment Cornish and Roden were at the edge, peering into the darkness. Cornish gave a breathless laugh.

"We shall have to fish him out," he said.

And he knelt down, ready to give a hand to Von Holzen. But the water, smooth again now, was not stirred by so much as a ripple.

"Suppose he can't swim?" muttered Roden, uneasily.

And they waited in a breathless silence. There was something horrifying in the single splash, and then the stillness.

"Gad!" whispered Cornish. "Where is he?"

Roden struck a match, and held it inside his hat so as to form a sort of lantern, though the air was still enough. Cornish did the same, and they held

the lights out over the water, throwing the feeble rays right across the canal.

"He cannot have swum away," he said. "Von Holzen," he cried out cautiously, after another pause—"Von Holzen—where are you?"

But there was no answer.

The surface of the canal was quite still and glassy in those parts that were not covered by the close-lying duck-weed. The water crept stealthily, slimily, towards the sea.

The two men held their breath and waited. Cornish was kneeling at the edge of the water, peering over.

"Where is he?" he repeated. "Gad! Roden, where is he?"

And Roden, in a hoarse voice, answered at length, "He is in the mud at the bottom—head downwards."

CHAPTER XXXI.

AT THE CORNER.

"L'homme s'agite et Dieu le mêne."

THE two men on the edge of the canal waited and listened again. It seemed still possible that Von Holzen had swum away in the darkness—had perhaps landed safely and unperceived on the other side.

"This," said Cornish, at length, "is a police affair. Will you wait here while I go and fetch them?"

But Roden made no answer, and in the sudden silence Cornish heard the eerie sound of chattering teeth. Percy Roden had morally collapsed. His mind had long been at a great tension, and this shock had unstrung him. Cornish seized him by the arm, and held him while he shook like a leaf and swayed heavily.

"Come, man," said Cornish, kindly—"come, pull yourself together."

He held him steadily and patiently until the shaking ceased.

"I'll go," said Roden, at length. "I couldn't stay here alone."

And he staggered away towards the Hague. It seemed hours before he came back. A carriage rattled past Cornish while he waited there, and two foot-passengers paused for a moment to look at him with some suspicion.

At last Roden returned, accompanied by a police official—a phlegmatic Dutchman, who listened to the story in silence. He shook his head at Cornish's suggestion, made in halting Dutch mingled with German, that Von Holzen had swum away in the darkness.

"No," said the officer, "I know these canals—and this above all others. They will find him, planted in the mud at the bottom, head downward like a tulip. The head goes in and the hands are powerless, for they only grasp soft mud like a fresh junket." He drew his short sword from its sheath, and scratched a deep mark in the gravel. Then he turned to the nearest tree, and made a notch on the bark with the blade. "There is nothing to be done to-night," he said philosophically. "There are men engaged in dredging the canal. I will set them to work at dawn before the world is astir. In the meantime"—he paused to return his sword to its scabbard—"in the meantime I must have the names and residence of these gentlemen. It is not for me to believe or disbelieve their story."

"Can you go home alone? Are you all right

now ? " Cornish asked Roden, as he walked away with him towards the Villa des Dunes.

" Yes, I can go home alone," he answered, and walked on by himself, unsteadily.

Cornish watched him, and, before he had gone twenty yards, Roden stopped.

" Cornish ! " he shouted.

" Yes."

And they walked towards each other.

" I did not know that Von Holzen was there. You will believe that ? "

" Yes ; I will believe that," answered Cornish.

And they parted a second time. Cornish walked slowly back to the hotel. He limped a little, for Von Holzen had in the struggle kicked him on the ankle. He suddenly felt very tired, but was not shaken. On the contrary, he felt relieved, as if that which he had been attempting so long had been suddenly taken from his hands and consummated by a higher power, with whom all responsibility rested. He went to bed with a mechanical deliberation, and slept instantly. The daylight was streaming into the window when he awoke. No one sleeps very heavily at the Hague—no one knows why—and Cornish awoke with all his senses about him at the opening of his bedroom door. Roden had come in and was standing by the bedside. His eyes had a sleepless look. He looked, indeed, as if he had been up all night, and had just had a bath.

" I say," he said, in his hollow voice—" I say,

get up. They have found him—and we are wanted. We have to go and identify him—and all that."

While Cornish was dressing, Roden sat heavily down on a chair near the window.

"Hope you'll stick by me," he said, and, pausing, stretched out his hand to the washing-stand to pour himself out a glass of water—"I hope you'll stick by me. I'm so confoundedly shaky. Don't know what it is—look at my hand." He held out his hand, which shook like a drunkard's.

"That is only nerves," said Cornish, who was ever optimistic and cheerful. He was too wise to weigh carefully his reasons for looking at the best side of events. "That is nothing. You have not slept, I expect."

"No; I've been thinking. I say, Cornish—you must stick by me—I have been thinking. What am I to do with the malgamiters? I cannot manage the devils as Von Holzen did. I'm—I'm a bit afraid of them, Cornish."

"Oh, that will be all right. Why, we have Wade, and can send for White if we want him. Do not worry yourself about that. What you want is breakfast. Have you had any?"

"No. I left the house before Dorothy was awake or the servants were down. She knows nothing. Dorothy and I have not hit it off lately."

Cornish made no answer. He was ringing the bell, and ordered coffee when the waiter came.

"Haven't met any incident in life yet," he said

cheerfully, "that seemed to justify missing out meals."

The incident that awaited them was not, however, a pleasant one, though the magistrate in attendance afforded a courteous assistance in the observance of necessary formalities. Both men made a deposition before him.

"I know something," he said to Cornish, "of this malgamite business. We have had our eye upon Von Holzen for some time—if only on account of the death-rate of the city."

They breathed more freely when they were out in the street. Cornish made some unimportant remark, which the other did not answer. So they walked on in silence. Presently Cornish glanced at his companion, and was startled at the sight of his face, which was grey, and glazed all over with perspiration, as an actor's face may sometimes be at the end of a great act. Then he remembered that Roden had not spoken for a long time.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"Didn't you see?" gasped Roden.

"See what?"

"The things they had laid on the table beside him. The things they found in his hands and his pockets."

"The knife, you mean," said Cornish, whose nerves were worthy of the blood that flowed in his veins, "and some letters?"

"Yes; the knife was mine. Everybody knows

it. It is an old dagger that has always lain on a table in the drawing-room at the Villa des Dunes."

"I have never been in the drawing-room at the Villa des Dunes except once by lamplight," said Cornish, indifferently.

Roden turned and looked at him, with eyes still dull with fear.

"And among the letters was the one you wrote to me, making the appointment. He must have stolen it from the pocket of my office-coat, which I never wear while I am working."

Cornish was nodding his head slowly. "I see," he said, at length—"I see. It was a pretty *coup*. To kill me, and fix the crime on you—and hang you?"

"Yes," said Roden, with a sudden laugh, which neither forgot to his dying day.

They walked on in silence. For there are times in nearly every man's life when events seem suddenly to outpace thought, and we can only act as seems best at the moment; times when the babbler is still and the busybody at rest; times when the cleverest of us must recognize that the long and short of it all is that man agitates himself and God leads him. At the corner of the Vyverberg they parted—Cornish to return to his hotel, Roden to go back to the works. His carriage was awaiting him in a shady corner of the Binnenhof. For Roden had his carriage now, and, like many possessing

suddenly such a vehicle, spent much time and thought in getting his money's worth out of it.

"If you want me, send for me, or come to the hotel," were Cornish's last words, as he shut the successful financier into his brougham.

At the hotel, Cornish found Mr. Wade and Marguerite lingering over a late breakfast.

"You look," said Marguerite, "as if you had been up to something." She glanced at him shrewdly. "Have you smashed Roden's Corner?" she asked.

"Yes," answered Cornish, turning to Mr. Wade; "and if you will come out into the garden, I will tell you how it has been done. Monsieur Creil said that the paper-makers could begin supplying themselves with malgamite at a day's notice. We must give them that notice this morning."

Mr. Wade, who was never hurried and never late, paused at the open window to light his cigar before following Marguerite.

"Ah," he said placidly, "then fortune must have favoured you, or something has happened to Von Holzen."

Cornish knew that it was useless to attempt to conceal anything whatsoever from the discerning Marguerite, so—in the quiet garden of the hotel, where the doves murmur sleepily on the tiles, and the breeze only stirs the flowers and shrubs sufficiently to disseminate their scents—he told father and daughter the end of Roden's Corner.

They were still in the garden, an hour later,

writing letters and telegrams, and making arrangements to meet this new turn in events, when Dorothy Roden came down the iron steps from the verandah.

She hurried towards them, and shook hands, without explaining her sudden arrival.

"Is Percy here?" she asked Cornish. "Have you seen him this morning?"

"He is not here, but I parted from him a couple of hours ago on the Vyverberg. He was going down to the works."

"Then he never got there," said Dorothy. "I have had nearly all the malgamiters at the Villa des Dunes. They are in open rebellion, and if Percy had been there they would have killed him. They have heard a report that Herr von Holzen is dead. Is it true?"

"Yes. Von Holzen is dead."

"And they broke into the office. They got at the books. They found out the profits that have been made, and they are perfectly wild with fury. They would have wrecked the Villa des Dunes, but——"

"But they were afraid of you, my dear," said Mr. Wade, filling in the blank that Dorothy left.

"Yes," she admitted.

"Well played," muttered Marguerite, with shining eyes.

Cornish had risen, and was folding away his papers. "I will go down to the works," he said.

"But you cannot go there alone," put in Dorothy, quickly.

"He will not need to do that," said Mr. Wade, throwing the end of his cigar into the bushes, and rising heavily from his chair.

Marguerite looked at her father with a little upward jerk of the head and a light in her eyes. It was quite evident that she approved of the old gentleman.

"He's a game old thing," she said, aside to Dorothy, while her father collected his papers.

"Your brother has probably been warned in time, and will not go near the works," said Cornish to Dorothy. "He was more than prepared for such an emergency; for he told me himself that he was half afraid of the men. He is almost sure to come to me here—in fact, he promised to do so if he wanted help."

Dorothy looked at him, and said nothing. The world would be a simpler dwelling-place if those who, for one reason or another, cannot say exactly what they mean would but keep silence.

Cornish told her, hurriedly, what had happened twelve hours ago on the bank of the Queen's Canal; and the thought of the misspent, crooked life that had ended in the black waters of that sluggish tideway made them all silent for a while. For death is in itself dignified, and demands respect for all with whom he has dealings. Many attain the distinction of vice in life, while more only reach the mere

mediocrity of foolishness; but in death all are equally dignified. We may, indeed, assume that we shall, by dying, at last command the respect of even our nearest relations and dearest friend—for a week or two, until they forget us.

"He was a clever man," commented Mr. Wade, shutting up his gold pencil-case and putting it in the pocket of his comfortable waistcoat. "But clever men are rarely happy——"

"And clever women—never," added Marguerite—that shrewd seeker after the last word.

While they were still speaking, Percy Roden came hurriedly down the steps. He was pale and tired, but his eye had a light of resolution in it. He held his head up, and looked at Cornish with a steady glance. It seemed that the vague danger which he had anticipated so nervously had come at last, and that he stood like a man in the presence of it.

"It is all up," he said. "They have found the books; they have understood them; and they are wrecking the place."

"They are quite welcome to do that," said Cornish.

Mr. Wade, who was always business-like, had reopened his writing-case when he saw Roden, and now came forward to hand him a written paper.

"That is a copy," he said, "of the telegram we have sent to Creil. He can come here and select what men he wants—the steady ones and the

CHAPTER XXXII.

ROUND THE CORNER.

"Les heureux ne rient pas; ils sourient."

Soon after Mr. Wade and Cornish had quitted their carriage, on that which is known as the New Scheveningen Road, and were walking across the dunes to the malgamite works, they met a policeman running towards them.

"It is," he answered breathlessly, to their inquiries—"it is the English Chemical Works on the dunes, which have caught fire. I am hurrying to the Artillery Station to telegraph for the fire-engines; but it will be useless. It will all be over in half an hour—by this wind and after so much dry weather: see the black smoke, excellencies."

And the man pointed towards a column of smoke, blown out over the sand-hills by the strong wind, characteristic of these flat coasts. Then, with a hurried salutation, he ran on.

Cornish and Mr. Wade proceeded more leisurely on their way; for the banker was not of a build to hurry even to a fire. Before they had gone far they perceived another man coming across the

dunes towards the Hague. As he approached Cornish recognized the man known as Uncle Ben. He was shambling along on unsteady legs, and carried his earthly belongings in a canvas sack of doubtful cleanliness. The recognition was apparently mutual; for Uncle Ben deviated from his path to come and speak to them.

"It's me, mister," he said to Cornish, not disrespectfully. "And I don't mind tellin' yer that I'm makin' myself scarce. That place is gettin' a bit too hot for me. They're just pullin' it down and makin' a bonfire of it. And if you or Mr. Roden goes there, they'll just take and chuck yer on top of it—and that's God's truth. They're a rough lot some of them, and they don't distinguish 'tween you and Mr. Roden like as I do. Soddim and Gomorrer, I say. Soddim and Gomorrer! There won't be nothin' left of yer in half an hour." And he turned and shook a dirty fist towards the rising smoke, which was all that remained of the malgamite works. He hurried on a few paces, then stopped and laid down his bag. He ran back, calling out "Mister!" as he neared Cornish and Mr. Wade. "I don't mind tellin' yer," he said to Cornish, with a ludicrous precautionary look round the deserted dunes, to make sure that he would not be overheard; for he was sober, and consequently stupid—"I don't mind tellin' yer—seein' as I'm makin' myself scarce, and for the sake o' Miss Roden, who has always been a good friend to me—as there's a hundred and twenty of 'em looking for

CHAPTER XXXII.

ROUND THE CORNER.

"Les heureux ne rient pas; ils sourient."

Soon after Mr. Wade and Cornish had quitted their carriage, on that which is known as the New Scheveningen Road, and were walking across the dunes to the malgamite works, they met a policeman running towards them.

"It is," he answered breathlessly, to their inquiries—"it is the English Chemical Works on the dunes, which have caught fire. I am hurrying to the Artillery Station to telegraph for the fire-engines; but it will be useless. It will all be over in half an hour—by this wind and after so much dry weather: see the black smoke, excellencies."

And the man pointed towards a column of smoke, blown out over the sand-hills by the strong wind, characteristic of these flat coasts. Then, with a hurried salutation, he ran on.

Cornish and Mr. Wade proceeded more leisurely on their way; for the banker was not of a build to hurry even to a fire. Before they had gone far they perceived another man coming across the

dunes towards the Hague. As he approached Cornish recognized the man known as Uncle Ben. He was shambling along on unsteady legs, and carried his earthly belongings in a canvas sack of doubtful cleanliness. The recognition was apparently mutual; for Uncle Ben deviated from his path to come and speak to them.

"It's me, mister," he said to Cornish, not disrespectfully. "And I don't mind tellin' yer that I'm makin' myself scarce. That place is gettin' a bit too hot for me. They're just pullin' it down and makin' a bonfire of it. And if you or Mr. Roden goes there, they'll just take and chuck yer on top of it—and that's God's truth. They're a rough lot some of them, and they don't distinguish 'tween you and Mr. Roden like as I do. Soddim and Gomorrer, I say. Soddim and Gomorrer! There won't be nothin' left of yer in half an hour." And he turned and shook a dirty fist towards the rising smoke, which was all that remained of the malgamite works. He hurried on a few paces, then stopped and laid down his bag. He ran back, calling out "Mister!" as he neared Cornish and Mr. Wade. "I don't mind tellin' yer," he said to Cornish, with a ludicrous precautionary look round the deserted dunes, to make sure that he would not be overheard; for he was sober, and consequently stupid—"I don't mind tellin' yer—seein' as I'm makin' myself scarce, and for the sake o' Miss Roden, who has always been a good friend to me—as there's a hundred and twenty of 'em looking for

Mr. Roden at this minute, meanin' to twist his neck ; and what's worse, there's others—men of eddication like myself—who has gone to the authorities to get a warrant out against him for false pretences, or murder, or something. And they'll get it too, with the story they've got to tell, and them poor devils planted thick as taters in the cheap corner of the cemetery. I've warned yer, mister." Uncle Ben expectorated with much emphasis, looked towards the malgamite works with a dubious shake of the head, and went on his way, muttering, " Soddim and Gomorrer."

His hearers walked on over the sand hills towards the smoke, of which the pungent odour, still faintly suggestive of sealing-wax, reached their nostrils. At the top of a high dune, surmounted with considerable difficulty, Mr. Wade stopped. Cornish stood beside him, and from that point of vantage they saw the last of the malgamite works. Amid the flames and smoke the forms of men flitted hither and thither, adding fuel to the fire.

" They are, at all events, doing the business thoroughly," said the banker. " And there is nothing to be gained by our disturbing them at it—and a good deal to be lost—namely, our lives. They are not burning the cottages, I see ; only the factory. There is nothing heroic about me, Tony. Let us go back."

But Mr. Wade returned to the Hague alone ; for Cornish had matters of importance requiring his

attention. It was now doubly necessary to get Roden safely away from Holland, and with the necessity increased the difficulty. For Holland is a small country, well watched, highly civilized. Cornish knew that it would be next to impossible for Roden to leave the country by rail or road. There remained, therefore, the sea. Cornish had, during his sojourn at the humble Swan at Scheveningen, made certain friends there. And it was to the old village under the dunes, little known to visitors, and a place apart from the fashionable bathing resort, that he went in his difficulty. He spent nearly the whole day in these narrow streets; indeed, he lunched at the Swan in company of a seafaring gentleman clad in soft blue flannel, and addicted to the mediæval coiffure still affected in certain parts of Zeeland.

From this quiet retreat Cornish also wrote a note to Dorothy at the Villa des Dunes, informing her of Roden's new danger, and warning her not to attempt to communicate with her brother, or even send him his baggage. In the afternoon Cornish made a few purchases, which he duly packed in a sailor's kit-bag, and at nightfall Roden arrived on foot.

The weather was squally, as it often is in August on these coasts; indeed, the summer seemed to have come to an end before its time.

"It is raining like the deuce," said Roden. "and I am wet through, though I came under the trees of the Oude Weg."

He spoke with his usual suggestion of a grievance, which made Cornish answer him rather curtly—

"We shall be wetter before we get on board."

It was raining when they quitted the modest Swan, and hurried through the sparsely lighted, winding streets. Cornish had borrowed two oil-skin coats and caps, which at once disguised them and protected them from the rain. Any passer-by would have taken them for a couple of fishermen going about their business. But there were few in the streets.

"Why are you doing all this for me?" asked Roden, suddenly.

"To avoid a scandal," replied Cornish, truthfully enough; for he had been brought up in a world where the longevity of scandal is fully understood.

The wide stretch of sand was entirely deserted when they emerged from the narrow streets and gained the summit of the sea-wall. A thunderstorm was growling in the distance, and every moment a flash of thin summer lightning shimmered on the horizon. The wind was strong, as it nearly always is here, and a shallow white surf stretched seaward across the flats. The sea roared continuously without that rise and fall of the breakers which marks a deeper coast, and from the face of the water there arose a filmy mist—part foam, part phosphorescence.

As Roden and Cornish passed the little lighthouse, two policemen emerged from the shadow of the wall, and watched them, half suspiciously.

"Good-evening," said one of them.

"Good evening," answered Cornish, mimicking the sing-song accent of the Scheveningen streets.

They walked on in silence.

"Whew!" ejaculated Roden, when the danger seemed to be past, and they could breathe again.

They went down a flight of steps to the beach, and stumbled across the soft sand towards the sea. One or two boats were lying out in the surf—heavy Dutch fishing-boats, known technically as "pinks," flat-bottomed, round-prowed, keelless—heavy and ungainly vessels, but strong as wood and iron and workmanship could make them. Some seemed to be afloat, others bumped heavily and continuously; while a few lay stolidly on the ground with the waves breaking right over them as over rocks.

The noise of the sea was so great that Cornish touched his companion's arm, and pointed, without speaking, to one of the vessels where a light twinkled feebly through the spray breaking over her. It seemed to be the only vessel preparing to go to sea on the high tide, and, in truth, the weather looked anything but encouraging.

"How are we going to get on board?" shouted Roden, amid the roar of the waves.

"Walk," answered Cornish; and he led the way into the sea.

Hampered as they were by their heavy oil-skins, their progress was slow, although the water barely reached their knees. The *Three Brothers* was bumping when they reached her and clambered on

board over the bluff sides, sticky with salt water and tar.

"She'll be afloat in ten minutes," said a man in oil-skins, who helped them over the low bulwarks. He spoke good English, and seemed to have learned some of the taciturnity of the seafaring portion of that nation with their language: for he went aft to the tiller without more words, and took his station there.

Roden seated himself on the rail and looked back towards Scheveningen. Cornish stood beside him in silence. The spray broke over them continuously, and the boat rolled and bumped in such a manner that it was impossible to stand or even sit without holding on to the clumsy rigging.

The lights of Scheveningen were stretched out in a line before them; the lighthouse winked a glaring eye that seemed to stare over their heads far out to sea. The summer lightning showed the sands to be bare and deserted. There were no unusual lights on the sea-wall. The Kurhaus and the hotels were illuminated and gay. The shore took no heed of the sea to-night.

"We've succeeded," said Roden, curtly, and quite suddenly he rolled over in a faint at Cornish's feet.

The next morning Dorothy received a letter at the Villa des Dunes, posted the evening before by Cornish at Scheveningen.

"We hope to get away to-night," he wrote, "in the 'pink,' the *Three Brothers*. Our intention is to

knock about the North Sea until we find a suitable vessel—either a sailing-ship trading between Norway and Spain on its way south, or a steamer going direct from Hamburg to South America. When I have seen your brother safely on board one of these vessels, I shall return in the *Three Brothers* to Scheveningen. She is a small boat, and has a large white patch of new canvas at the top of her mainsail. So if you see her coming in, or waiting for the tide, you may conclude that your brother is in safety."

Later in the day Mr. Wade called, having driven from the Hague very comfortably in an open carriage.

"The house," he said placidly, "is still watched, but I have no doubt that Tony has outwitted them all. Creil arrived last night, and seems a capable man. He tells me that half of the malgamiters are in jail at the Hague for intoxication and uproariousness last night. He is selecting those he wants, and the rest he will send to their homes. So we are balancing our affairs very comfortably; and if there is anything I can do for you, Miss Roden, I am at your command."

"Oh, Dorothy is all right," said Marguerite, rather hurriedly; and when her father took his leave, she slipped her hand within his solid arm, and walked with him across the sand towards the carriage. "Haven't you seen," she asked—"you old stupid! —that Dorothy is all right? Tony is in love with her."

"No," replied the banker, rather humbly—"no, my dear. I am afraid I had not noticed it."

Marguerite pressed his arm, not unkindly. "You can't help it," she explained. "You are only a man, you know."

The following days were quiet enough at the Villa des Dunes, and it is in quiet days that a friendship ripens best. The two girls left there scarcely expected to hear of Cornish's return for some days; but they fell into the habit of walking towards the sea whenever they went out-of-doors, and spent many afternoon hours on the dunes. During these hours Dorothy had many confidential and lively conversations with her new-found friend. Indeed, confidence and gaiety were so bewilderingly mingled that Dorothy did not always understand her companion.

One afternoon, three days after the departure of Percy Roden, when Von Holzen was buried, and the authorities had expressed themselves content with the verdict that he had come accidentally by his death, Marguerite took occasion to congratulate herself, and all concerned, in the fact that what she vaguely called "things" were beginning to straighten themselves out.

"We are round the corner," she said decisively. "And now papa and I shall go home again, and Miss Williams will come back. Miss Williams—oh, lor! She is one of those women who have a stick inside them instead of a heart. And papa will trot out his young men—likely young men from the city.

Papa married the bank, you know. And he wants me to marry another bank and live gorgeously ever afterwards. Poor old dear!"

"I think he would rather you were happy than gorgeous," said Dorothy, with a laugh, who had seen some of the honest banker's perplexity with regard to this most delicate financial affair.

"Perhaps he would. At all events, he does his best—his very best. He has tried at least fifty of these gentle swains since I came back from Dresden—red hair and a temper, black hair and an excellent opinion of one's self, fair hair and stupidity. But they wouldn't do—they wouldn't do, Dorothy!"

Marguerite paused, and made a series of holes in the sand with her walking-stick.

"There was only one," she said quietly, at length. "I suppose there is always—only one—eh, Dorothy?"

"I suppose so," answered Dorothy, looking straight in front of her.

Marguerite was silent for a while, looking out to sea with a queer little twist of the lips that made her look older—almost a woman. One could imagine what she would be like when she was middle-aged, or quite old, perhaps.

"He would have done," she said. "Quite easily. He was a million times cleverer than the rest—a million times—well, he was quite different, I don't know how. But he was paternal. He thought he was much too old, so he didn't try——"

She broke off with a light laugh, and her confidential manner was gone in a flash. She stuck her stick firmly into the ground, and threw herself back on the soft sand.

"So," she cried gaily. "*Vogue la galère.* It's all for the best. That is the right thing to say when it cannot be helped, and it obviously isn't for the best. But everybody says it, and it is always wise to pass in with the crowd, and be conventional—if you swing for it."

She broke off suddenly, looking at her companion's face. A few boats had been leisurely making for the shore all the afternoon before a light wind, and Dorothy had been watching them. They were coming closer now.

"Dorothy, do you see the *Three Brothers?*"

"That is the *Three Brothers*," answered Dorothy, pointing with her walking-stick.

For a time they were silent, until, indeed, the boat with the patched sail had taken the ground gently, a few yards from the shore. A number of men landed from her, some of them carrying baskets of fish. One, walking apart, made for the dunes, in the direction of the New Scheveningen Road.

"And that is Tony," said Marguerite. "I should know his walk—if I saw him coming out of the Ark, which, by the way, must have been rather like the *Three Brothers* to look at. He has taken your brother safely away, and now he is coming—to take you."

"He may remember that I am Percy's sister," suggested Dorothy.

"It doesn't matter whose sister you are," was the decisive reply. "Nothing matters"—Marguerite rose slowly, and shook the sand from her dress—"nothing matters, except one thing, and that appears to be a matter of absolute chance."

She climbed slowly to the summit of the dune under which they had been sitting, and there, pausing, she looked back. She nodded gaily down at Dorothy. Then suddenly she held out her hands before her, and Cornish, looking up, saw her slim young form poised against the sky in a mock attitude of benediction.

"Bless you, my dears," she cried, and with a short laugh turned and walked towards the Villa des Dunes.

THE END.

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN.

ESTABLISHED 1798

T. NELSON
AND SONS
PRINTERS AND
PUBLISHERS

THE NELSON LIBRARY

OF COPYRIGHT FICTION

Uniform with this Volume and same Price.

THE WAR IN THE AIR. H. G. Wells.
"The War in the Air" is a story of the awful devastation following a conflict between two first-class powers with the resources of the air at their command. It is one of the most brilliant and successful of Mr. Wells's studies in futurity.

A GENTLEMAN OF FRANCE. Stanley J. Weyman.
This is the first novel by which Mr. Weyman won his great reputation. It is a tale of France during the religious wars of the sixteenth century, and has long ranked as one of the most brilliant historical romances of our day.

RED POTTAGE. Mary Cholmondeley.
The publishers are happy to be able to include in their Sevenpenny Library Miss Mary Cholmondeley's best-known book. It is a study of modern English society, and the different types are most clearly and trenchantly drawn.

FOREST FOLK. James Prior.

Mr. Prior is the novelist of Sherwood Forest, and no modern writer save Mr. Hardy has such a mastery of country life. The present book tells of the early days of last century, the days of the "Luddite" riots and the French wars. As a love story it has few equals in modern fiction.

HETTY WESLEY. "Q."

This love story of one of the members of the Wesley family is perhaps "Q's" most brilliant novel, as distinct from those romances with which his name is chiefly associated.

HURRISH. Hon. Emily Lawless.

This is a tale of peasant life in Ireland which has few rivals in Irish literature. It is done with the dignity and restraint of a Greek tragedy.

A DAUGHTER OF THE SNOWS. Jack London.

Mr. Jack London has given us many studies of the Klondyke, usually in its wilder aspects. In this love story, set against a background of the long winter and the rough mining life, he shows as sure a touch as in his studies of savagery and adventure.

JEMMY ABERCRAW. Bernard Capes.

In this brilliant romance the chief figure is a highwayman who conducts his profession in a spirit of light-hearted chivalry. The last of the Jacobite plots in England is introduced into the narrative.

RULES OF THE GAME. Stewart Edward White.
Mr. S. E. White is one of the best of those younger American novelists who deal with man in his conflicts with nature. This is a story of the Californian Sierras and the great duel between the financial trusts and the Government for the preservation of the forests. Like all Mr. White's books it is full of swift incident and the magic of the wilds.

THE MEMOIRS OF SHERLOCK HOLMES. A. Conan Doyle.
The publishers are happy to be able to add to their Sevenpenny Library the first collection of those stories which have made the name of Sherlock Holmes a household word throughout the world.

THE OSBORNES. E. F. Benson.
In this book Mr. Benson has provided a careful and sympathetic study of a middle-class family who rise to affluence. It is full of brilliant humour and wide human sympathy.

THE RETURN OF THE EMIGRANT. Lydia M. Mackay.
This is a story of modern Highland life, full of carefully studied types, and lit with all the glamour of the Western Highlands. It is the most important recent contribution to Scottish fiction.

THE COUNTRY OF THE BLIND. H. G. Wells.
Mr. Wells as a short story writer may be ranked along with Mr. Kipling, and this volume represents his final selection from short stories hitherto published, together with many that have not appeared in book form. They range over every type, from social analysis to scientific fantasy, and all are examples of that imaginative power which has given to Mr. Wells his great reputation.

SIMON DALE. Anthony Hope.

This is Mr. Anthony Hope's only historical novel. It deals with the Court of Charles II., and gives a brilliant picture of that complex age, relieved by a charming love story.

THE PALADIN. H. A. Vachell.

Mr. Vachell's gift of sympathetic understanding has rarely appeared to better advantage than in this story. It is a fascinating study of quixotry and idealism.

ADVENTURE. Jack London.

This novel is the fruit of Mr. Jack London's recent experiences in the South Seas—experiences more full of wonder and peril than any romance.

THE PURSUIT OF MR. FAVIEL. R. E. Vernède.

Mr. R. E. Vernède is a young writer whom the publishers are happy to introduce to readers of Nelson's Library. "The Pursuit of Mr. Faviel" will be found one of the most breathless farces which has been published for many a day.

A CHILD OF THE JAGO. A. Morrison.

Mr. Morrison has won fame by his realistic studies of the life of the London poor. "A Child of the Jago" is a tale of this type, but its realism is always relieved by imagination and romance.

LADY GOOD-FOR-NOTHING. "Q" (Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch).

Sir Oliver Vyell, the British Collector of Customs at Boston, rescues a poor girl from the stocks, educates her, and makes her mistress of his household. The scene moves to Lisbon, and there is a wonderful picture of the earthquake.

THE BROKEN ROAD. A. E. W. Mason.

In this novel Mr. Mason deals with the eternal problem of East and West. In it an Indian prince, educated in England, falls in love with an English girl, and then realizes the gulf which separates him from his English friends. In his anger he heads a revolt of his frontier tribe, and dies in a futile effort to turn back the march of British civilization. It is not only a brilliant story, but an acute study of a permanent political question.

PRESTER JOHN. John Buchan.

This is a tale of a great Kaffir rising in the Transvaal, which is frustrated by the courage and nerve of a Scottish storekeeper. When it first appeared it was declared by many critics to be the finest romance of adventure since Stevenson.

SOPHY OF KRAVONIA. Anthony Hope.

This is the third of Mr. Anthony Hope's great romances on what has been called the "Zenda model." It traces the astonishing career of Sophy Grouch from a kitchen-maid in Essex till, for a short season, she becomes Queen of Kravonia. It is a splendid tale of love and high politics conducted in an atmosphere of swift adventure.

RUPERT OF HENTZAU. Anthony Hope

This is a sequel to the famous "Prisoner of Zenda," already published in the Nelson Library. It tells of the end of the long vendetta between young Rupert of Hentzau and the Englishman, Rudolph Rassendyll. It is needless to praise a book which, with its predecessor, has been recognized as one of the greatest of modern romances.

THE NELSON LIBRARY.

Uniform with this Volume and same Price.

CONDENSED LIST.

Arranged alphabetically under Authors' Names.

BAILEY, H. C.—Springtime; Beaujeu.
BELLOC, H.-Mr. Clutterbuck's Election.
BENSON, E. F.—The Osbornes; etc.
BIRMINGHAM, G.—Simpkins Plot.
BRADDON, Miss.—Lady Audley's Secret; Vixen.
BRAMAH, E.—Secret of the League.
BUCHAN, J.—Prester John.
BURNETT, Mrs. F. H.—Making of a Marchioness.
By the Author of "Elizabeth and her German Garden."—Princess Priscilla's Fortnight.
CAINE, HALL.—A Son of Hagar.
CAPES, B.—Jemmy Abercraw.
CASTLE, A. and E.—French Nan; Incomparable Bellairs; etc.
CHILDERS, E.—Riddle of the Sands.
CLIFFORD, W. K.—Woodside Farm.
CONRAD, J., and F. M. HUEFFER.—Romance.
COPPING, A.—Gotty and the Guv'nor.
DOUGLAS, G.—House with the Green Shutters.
DOYLE, A. CONAN.—The Refugees; Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes; Adventures of Sherlock Holmes; etc.
FALKNER, J. M.—Moonfleet.
FORREST, R. E.—Eight Days.
FUTRELLE, J.—Lady in the Case.
GISSING, G.—Born in Exile; etc.
GRIER, S. C.—Warden of the Marches.
HARLAND, H.—Cardinal's Snuff-Box; My Friend Prospero.
HARRADEN, B.—Katharine Frensham; Interplay.
HOPE, A.—Prisoner of Zenda; A Man of Mark; Rupert of Hentzau; Tristram of Blent; Simon Dale; etc.
HORNUNG, E. W.—Raffles; Mr. Justice Raffles.
HYNE, CUTCLIFFE.—Thompson's Progress; Mr. Horrocks, Purser.
JACOB, VIOLET.—The Interloper.
JACOBS, W. W.—Lady of the Barge; Skipper's Wooing.
LAWLESS, Hon. EMILY.—Hurrish.
LONDON, J.—White Fang; Adventure; A Daughter of the Snows.
MACNAUGHTAN, S.—Expensive Miss Du Cane; Fortune of Christina M'Nab; The Gift; etc.
MACKAY, L. M.-Return of the Emigrant.
MALET, L.—Gateless Barrier; Wages of
MARSHALL, A.—Exton Manor. [Sin.
MASEFIELD, J.—Captain Margaret; Multitude and Solitude.
MASON, A. E. W.—Clementina; The Four Feathers; The Broken Road.
MERRICK, L.—Call from the Past; etc.
MERRIMAN, H.S.—Isle of Unrest; The Vultures; In Kedar's Tents; etc.
MORRISON, A.—A Child of the Jago.
NICHOLSON, M.—War of the Carolinas; House of a Thousand Candles.
NORRIS, F.—The Octopus; The Pit; etc.
OLLIVANT, A.—Owd Bob.
PAIN, B.—The One Before.
PARKER, Sir G.—When Valmond came to Pontiac; Right of Way; etc.
PASTURE, Mrs. H. DE LA.—Grey Knight; Lonely Lady of Grosvenor Square; Man from America.
PHILLPOTTS, E.—American Prisoner; Farm of the Dagger.
PRIOR, J.—Forest Folk.
"Q."—Major Vigoureux; True Tilda; Hetty Wesley; etc.
RIDGE, PETT.—Mrs. Galer's Business.
ROBERTS, MORLEY.—Salt of the Sea.
SAVILE, FRANK.—The Road.
SIDGWICK, Mrs. A.—Cousin Ivo; Cynthia's Way.
SILBERRAD, U. L.—Good Comrade; John Bolsover; Ordinary People.
SNAITH, J. C.—Fortune.
TARKINGTON, B.—Gentleman from Indiana; Monsieur Beaucaire, etc.
TWAIN, MARK.—Tom Sawyer; Huckleberry Finn.
VACHELL, H. A.—John Charity; The Waters of Jordan; The Other Side; The Paladin.
VERNEDE, R. E.—Pursuit of Mr. Faviel.
WARD, Mrs. H.—Lady Rose's Daughter; Marcella; Marriage of William Ashe; Eleanor; etc.
WELLS, H. G.—Kipps; History of Mr. Polly; Country of the Blind; etc.
WHITE, S. E.—Blazed Trail; Rules of the Game.
WHITEING, R.—No. 5 John Street.
WILLIAMSON, C. N. and A. M.—Love and the Spy; Princess Passes; etc.

T. NELSON & SONS, London, Edinburgh, Dublin, and New York.

PR
RL
14
THE LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
Santa Barbara
STACK COLLECTION
THIS BOOK IS DUE ON THE LAST DATE
STAMPED BELOW.

3 1205 02089 6492

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY

A A 001 425 112 8